Essex Wildlife Trust owns or manages 87 nature reserves, 2 nature parks and 8 visitor centres across the county.

This book is aimed at giving you the best possible all-round experience of visiting Essex Wildlife Trust's nature reserves.

Features include:

- Vivid photographs
- Details of species on each nature reserve
- Directions of how to get to the nature reserve and visiting times
- A map of the nature reserve
- Best time of year to visit.

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Essex Wildlife Trust Nature Reserves Guide

Tony Gunton

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Wildlife Trust

Nature Reserves Handbook

edited by Tony Gunton

Published by Essex Wildlife Trust,
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Important contributors

We would like to offer a special thank you to Tony Gunton for all his work to produce and edit this publication on behalf of Essex Wildlife Trust. Many other people have provided information for this publication, by checking entries for the nature reserves under their management. We would like to thank them all for their support with this, and also David Harris, who did the final proof read.

Thank you to Chris Baines, President, Essex Wildlife Trust for providing an inspiring foreword for this publication.

Photographers

Thank you to all of the photographers whose wonderful photographs have been used in this publication. They reflect the beauty of Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserves. Photographers are credited on each photo.

Michele Kench, Fundraising and Marketing Manager, Essex Wildlife Trust

Foreword

Welcome to "Essex Wildlife Trust's Nature Reserves Guide". This has been written specially for our members, and provides you with details of all Essex Wildlife Trust's nature reserves. The range and variety of these very special corners of the county is astonishing, and we very much hope the Guide will help you to enjoy as many of them as possible.

As the President of Essex Wildlife Trust I can see what a truly inspiring county Essex is for anyone with an interest in wildlife. Many of the best places are managed by Essex Wildlife Trust – 7,500 acres of land on 87 nature reserves and 2 nature parks so far – and all this is made possible thanks to the support of Trust members.

Essex is a county of contrasts. It has some of the wildest of England's coastal landscapes and its creeks, mudflats and salt marshes are world-class. It is very much a food-producing county, but even amongst the most intensive agriculture there are still pockets of wildflower meadows and wetlands rich in wildlife. The ancient woodlands of Essex are among the best in the country, and can guarantee you sheets of wild lily of the valley, rare autumn fungi and the breathtaking sound of nightingales if you use the Guide wisely.

The urban areas of Essex are equally inspiring. This county has a great industrial heritage, and many of the landscapes along the Thames Estuary and in the heavily built-up areas to the west have remarkably rich pockets of greenspace. The "lost world" of our chalk quarry nature reserves is particularly spectacular, and we are creating new habitats on huge areas of land right on the doorstep of millions of people.

Of course, we know that nature reserves are not enough. We want the whole of Essex to support as much wildlife as possible, so our Living Landscapes campaign is weaving entire landscapes back together, and we are working successfully in partnership with farmers and many other landowners to make the whole county more welcoming for wildlife and for people. This may mean reconnecting long stretches of the shoreline, or managing whole stream and river valleys. In towns and villages it may mean encouraging as many families as possible to garden with wildlife in mind, and to make more of the habitat potential in parks, school grounds and other larger patches of a local neighbourhood.

I hope this new guide will encourage even more Essex Wildlife Trust members to enjoy the feast of natural experiences that this county has to offer. As you wander through bluebell woods in spring, picnic amongst the butterflies and wildflowers of a summer meadow or soak up the sights and sounds of thousands of geese and wading birds on the tidal mudflats in the winter, I hope you will be inspired to encourage many more of your friends to join you in supporting the Trust.

Our 32,000 members are already making a huge difference, and the Trust is very grateful for your support, but with even greater numbers we could do so much more – so who can you persuade to join us? Together we can make sure future generations of Essex people inherit an even richer natural legacy.

Chris Baines, President, Essex Wildlife Trust
National Vice President of the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts

Using this handbook

Reserve entries are arranged alphabetically by name starting on page 12. If you want to find reserves within easy reach of you or of a particular place, look at the map on pages 8–9. For reserves with particular features, refer to the index on pages 10–11.

Each entry contains a brief description of the reserve and its wildlife, a map, and a panel giving arrangements for visiting. See below for keys to the information in the heading and in the visiting panel.

Information about visiting times and other restrictions and about public transport was accurate at the time of publication but may change. To avoid disappointment, please telephone or check the Trust website at www.essexwt.org.uk or other web sources before undertaking a long journey.

Essex Wildlife Trust welcomes responsible dog owners, but please note the restrictions on dogs that apply on some nature reserves and at some times, such as when grazing animals are present.

Please note there are a small number of reserves with no public access.

The maps are intended to give you a good idea of what you will find when you visit a reserve, and to help you to find your way around. They should not be taken as a definitive guide to rights of way. Footpaths may sometimes be closed temporarily for conservation or safety reasons; please observe any closure signs that you come across.

See opposite page for a key to the notation used in the maps.

Blue House Farm

601ac/240ha OS Ex175-6 TQ 856 971 SSSI (part), SPA

Size in acres and hectares — *OS Explorer map(s)* — *OS grid reference* — *Designations (see below)*

Key to Visiting

- How to get there
- Public transport
- Opening times
- Best time to visit
- Facilities/notes for disabled visitors
- Provision for/restrictions on dogs (= livestock sometimes present)
- Further information from... (= leaflet available)
- Warnings and guidance for visitors

SSSI Site of Special Scientific Interest
Area notified by Natural England as important and with statutory protection.

SPA Special Protection Area
Strictly protected sites designated under the EC Birds Directive.

SAC Special Area of Conservation
Strictly protected sites designated under the EC Habitats Directive.

LNR Local Nature Reserve
Nature reserve of local importance, established by a Local Authority (usually with public access).

Key to maps

Vegetation
- grass or heath
- scrub
- woodland
- new woodland
- marsh/fen
- reed bed
- saltmarsh
- mud
- sand or shingle
- arable

Water bodies
- fresh/ brackish
- salt

Site boundary

Facilities
- visitor centre
- museum
- bird hide
- information board
- play area
- picnic area
- pub
- refreshments
- parking
- " with fee
- " informal
- " disabled
- toilets (WC)

Paths
- foot only
- in between†
- wheelchair
- bridleway/ horse ride

Features
- sea wall
- bank or cliff
- church
- golf course
- viewpoint
- building
- built-up area

Entrances
- vehicle
- other

Roads
- surfaced
- other/track

† surfaced paths suitable for people with walking difficulties and possibly usable by wheelchairs, e.g. with assistance

Map of visitor centres and nature reserves

Index of sites and summary of facilities

Key

ha	*Approx size in hectares (1 ha = 2.47 acres)*
Pt	*Accessible by public transport*
Ce	*Visitor centre open most days*
Di	*Facilities for disabled visitors*
Hi	*Hides for viewing wildlife*
Ed	*Educational services for children*
Re	*Restrictions on access apply other than opening times, e.g. permit must be obtained first*

	ha	facilities					page
Abberton Reservoir	23		Ce	Di	Hi	Ed	12
Abbotts Hall Farm	280			Di	Hi		14
Aubrey Buxton	10						16
Backwarden, The	12	Pt					17
Barnes Spinney	1	Pt				Re	18
Bedfords Park	87		Ce			Ed	18
Blue House Farm	240	Pt			Hi		20
Bradwell Shell Bank	80						22
Brookes Reserve	24						24
Chafford Gorges Nature Park	66	Pt	Ce	Di		Ed	25
Chigborough Lakes	18						28
Colne Point	273				Hi	Re	29
Copperas Wood	14						31
Cranham Marsh	13	Pt					32
Crowsheath Wood	8						33
Danbury Ridge	100	Pt					34
Fingringhoe Wick	50		Ce	Di	Hi	Ed	36
Fobbing Marsh	75						38
Gernon Bushes	32						39
Great Holland Pits	16	Pt					40
Grove House Wood	2	Pt					41
Hanningfield Res.	40		Ce	Di	Hi	Ed	41
Harrison Sayer	1						43
Hawksmere Springs	2						44
Heather Hills	7	Pt					45
Hitchcock's Meadows	6	Pt					46
Hogmarsh	5	Pt					47
Horndon Meadow	1						47
Howlands Marsh	74				Hi		48
Hunsdon Mead	27	Pt					49
Iron Latch	4						50
John Weston	4	Pt				Re	51
Langdon Lake & Meadows	16	Pt					52
Langdon	211	Pt	Ce	Di		Ed	53
Lexden Gathering Grounds	9	Pt					56
Linford Wood	9	Pt					57
Lion Creek & Lower Raypits	65				Hi		58
Little Haven	42	Pt		Di			59
Little Waltham Meadows	9						60
Loshes Reserve	7						61
Maldon Wick	6	Pt					62
Newland Grove	3						63
Oakfield Wood	3	Pt					64
Onslow Green	1						64
Oxley Meadow	3						65
Phyllis Currie	9			Di	Hi		66
Pound Wood	22	Pt					67
Ray Island	40	Pt					68
Roding Valley Meadows	63	Pt		Di			70
Roman River Valley	18	Pt					72
Rushy Mead	5	Pt					73
Saint Peter's Marsh	0.5	Pt					74
Sandylay and Moat Woods	7						74
Sawbridgeworth Marsh	9	Pt					75
Sergeant's Orchard	3						76
Shadwell Wood	7						77
Shotgate Thickets	3						78
Shut Heath Wood	20	Pt					79
Stanford Warren	17	Pt					80
Stow Maries Halt	2						81
Sweetings Meadow	0.6						81
Thorndon Country Park	214		Ce	Di	Hi	Ed	82
Thrift Wood	19	Pt					84
Thurrock Thameside Nature Park	342	Pt	Ce	Di	Hi	Ed	85
Tile Wood	6	Pt					87
Tiptree Heath	24	Pt		Di			87
Tollesbury Wick	240	Pt			Hi		89
Turner's Spring	3						91
Two Tree Island	260	Pt		Di	Hi		92
Warley Place	10					Re	93
Waterhall Meadows	2						94
Weeleyhall Wood	31	Pt					95
West Wood	23						96
Westhouse Wood	3	Pt					97
Woodham Fen	8	Pt					98
Wrabness	22			Di	Hi		99

Abberton Reservoir

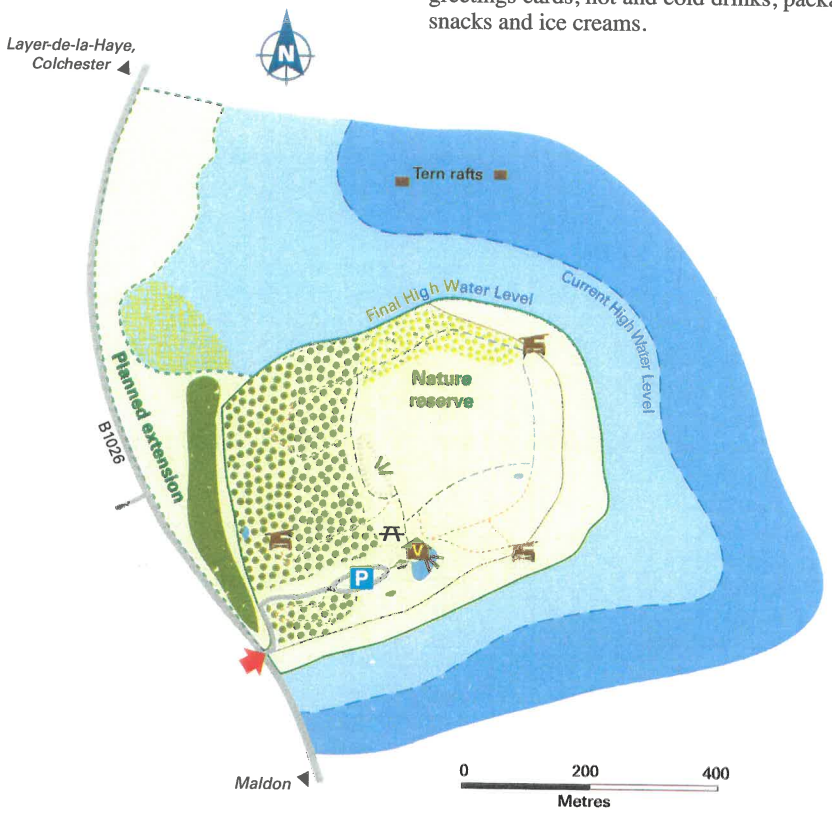
57ac/23ha OS Ex184 TL 965 180 SSSI, SPA Visitor Centre

In 2010 Essex & Suffolk Water, which owns Abberton Reservoir, started work to raise the levels of the reservoir, to meet increasing demand for water. The original visitor centre and nature reserve will go under water when the work is complete, so a new centre and reserve has been constructed on higher ground nearby, to be run by Essex Wildlife Trust in partnership with Essex & Suffolk Water. It opened on 5th March 2012 – an important step in the reservoir enhancement project.

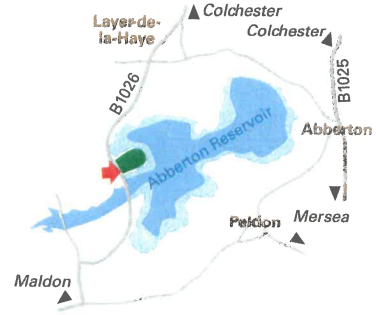
Areas have been planted up to develop into woodland and scrub, bordering a large area of grassland leading down towards the reservoir, with bird hides overlooking the water and the tern rafts. A third hide overlooks the developing woodland and there are several ponds. Nature trails have been laid out giving access to all the habitats and to the hides. There are also stunning panoramic views across the reservoir and surrounding villages from the higher ground.

Brown hare, skylark, lapwing and various butterfly species have already been attracted to the rough grassland, and dragonflies to the ponds. Raptors including short-eared owl visit in winter, and in summer common terns nest on the rafts moored nearby.

The visitor centre offers a great viewing area, toilet facilities, and a well-stocked shop, including binoculars and telescopes, wildlife books and DVDs, bird food and feeders, gifts, greetings cards, hot and cold drinks, packaged snacks and ice creams.



Five miles south-west of Colchester on the B1026, a minor road linking Colchester and Maldon, just outside Layer-de-la-Haye. Look out for brown 'Abberton Reservoir Visitor Centre' signs.



Open daily 9am to 5pm except Christmas and Boxing Day. Collect a permit from the centre – free to Essex Wildlife Trust members, otherwise a donation is requested.

Good all year round, but especially in winter for wildfowl; May and June for breeding birds; and August for moulting swans and ducks.

The centre is all on one level and fully accessible to disabled visitors. There is a circular all-weather footpath suitable for wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

Only guide dogs for the blind are allowed in the centre and reserve. A short dog walk is provided near the car park.

The Centre organises a regular programme of events for both adults and children. Call 01206 738172 for details.

The huge expanse of Essex & Suffolk Water's Abberton Reservoir is of international importance as a safe haven for wild ducks, swans and other water birds, whether resident, passing through on migration or over-wintering.

Up to 40,000 ducks, swans and geese visit every year. Total numbers of the top seven species – wigeon, teal, mallard, pochard, tufted duck, coot and black-headed gull – can run to many thousands. Added to this there can be hundreds of shoveler, gadwall, goldeneye, pintail and great crested grebe.

In spring there is the unusual sight of cormorants nesting in trees, one of the few places in Britain where they do this. They began in 1981 and have continued ever since.

Late summer brings the spectacle of large numbers of swans and ducks moulting – replacing their worn-out feathers – on the reservoir. Safety is vital while they do so because they replace all their flight feathers at once, which means that for a while they are unable to fly.

In dry conditions, water levels fall temporarily to expose large expanses of mud. This attracts large numbers of passage waders such as ruff and spotted redshank from the coast.

The enlargement of the reservoir will bring more diverse habitats as well as higher water levels. Extensive reedbeds will be created to attract species like bearded tit and possibly even breeding bittern, and to provide cover for water voles. Shallower fringes will attract many more waders, and it is hoped that bewick's swans will establish a regular wintering population.

Teal pair (female left)

Abbotts Hall Farm

700ac/280ha OS Ex184 TL 963 146 SSSI (part), SPA

Seven miles south of Colchester just off the B1026, south of Abberton Reservoir and west of the village of Great Wigborough. From Colchester take the B1026 towards Maldon and turn off left towards Peldon about 3km beyond the causeway across Abberton Reservoir, or follow the B1026 from Maldon and keep straight on where it turns sharp left about 4km beyond Tolleshunt d'Arcy. The entrance is about 1km down on the right.

Open to the public Monday–Friday only, 9am–5pm. Regular weekend walks are organised: call Essex Wildlife Trust on 01621 862960 to book. For up-to-date information check the Trust website at *www.essexwt.org.uk*.

Dogs not permitted on the farm. Dogs restricted to dog walk adjacent to main building.

This is a working farm and sometimes paths will be closed for safety reasons.

This coastal farm was bought by Essex Wildlife Trust in 2000 using a legacy from the late Joan Elliot, with support from Trust members, WWF, English Nature, the Environment Agency and the Heritage Lottery Fund. It is a demonstration site for sustainable coastal defence and also a working farm rich in wildlife.

Coastal realignment

The Blackwater estuary is among the largest estuaries in East Anglia. One of the main threats to this important wildlife area is 'coastal squeeze' due to sea-level rise. On the Essex coast sea level is rising by around 6mm per year due to the combined effects of global warming and the settling of the land mass in the south-east. The seawalls surrounding most of the coast today were constructed over 300 years ago to reclaim land from the sea. 'Coastal squeeze' is the result of the sea pinning the saltmarsh against the seawall and causing erosion. In the recent past 40% of Essex saltmarsh has been lost in this way.

The coastal realignment project at Abbotts Hall Farm was designed to recreate lost habitats by allowing salt water back on to the land reclaimed originally. Two new counter walls were constructed at either end of the site to protect neighbouring land but elsewhere the land rises gently, checking the incoming tide without additional sea defenses. This has allowed the creation of 200 acres of mudflat, saltmarsh and coastal grassland.

The seawall was breached in five places in October 2002 and very quickly saltmarsh plants moved in. Other signs of marine life include shore crabs, jellyfish, lugworms and shrimps, and a number of fish species.

New grassland has been created between the developing saltmarsh and the remaining arable fields, and sheep are now back grazing where in past times the Essex coastal grasslands supported large flocks, an important source of wool and meat.

Farming and wildlife

Over much of Essex, wildlife has been finding it more and more difficult to keep a foothold on the modern arable farm. Farmland birds such as skylark, grey partridge and corn bunting have all experienced massive declines. The Trust is aiming to improve the lot of wildlife on the farm while continuing to grow food economically.

For over 30 years the previous cropping regime was dominated by wheat. Now the Trust is growing a wide range of crops, including wild bird seed mixes. Further diversification into saline crops and other niche markets is planned.

Conditions for wildlife have been improved in other ways by planting and coppicing hedges, leaving uncultivated field margins, and creating beetle banks across the centre of fields to encourage predatory insects.

Already results for wildlife are looking good. The skylark population has increased along with many species of breeding bird, including yellowhammers, whitethroats, wagtails and owls. Large numbers of overwintering finches and thrushes feed on the food-rich field margins and in the hedgerows. Water voles breed on the stream and round the lake.

Visitor facilities

The site has a network of surfaced tracks with signposted nature trails, a large freshwater lake with nesting islands and a kingfisher bank, and several ponds.

Two bird hides give good views over the developing coastal habitats, and across the Salcott Channel to RSPB's Old Hall Marshes reserve opposite. Many waders and wildfowl feed on the marsh. Peregrine falcons and marsh harriers often fly through looking for prey, causing bird flocks to take flight in alarm. A third hide overlooks the maturing freshwater lake where you may see water rail, kingfisher and little egret.

Aubrey Buxton

24ac/10ha OS Ex195 TL 521 264

Originally the pleasure park to Norman House, this nature reserve is high woodland interspersed with grassland, on a sandy/gravel soil. It has three man-made ponds, probably about 200 years old, and three further ponds dug in the 1950s when it was a wildlife park. It was donated to Essex Wildlife Trust by Lord and the late Lady Buxton in 1976.

Cowslip, wild strawberry and common spotted orchid grow in the meadows, along with the uncommon lesser lady's mantle and adderstongue fern.

The many bird species include nuthatch, all three species of woodpecker and a number of summer visitors. There is a rookery.

22 species of butterfly have been recorded and in good years numbers can be impressive.

Black poplars have been planted to replace storm-damaged trees. This species formerly played an important part in country life, being planted to give shade to cattle and to provide firewood and charcoal for the home.

Just north of Stansted: turn east off the B1383 (Bishop's Stortford–Stansted–Cambridge) on to Alsa Street. The entrance is 200m up a private road (with white gate-posts at its end) on the right.

Hourly bus service along B1383: get off at Alsa Lodge turning.

Accessible at all times.

Spring or summer.

Common spotted orchid

Backwarden

30ac/12ha OS Ex183 TL 781 041 SSSI

The south-western part of Danbury Common (which is owned by the National Trust) is known as The Backwarden and is managed by Essex Wildlife Trust.

It has a great variety of habitats for its size. There are a number of pools and bogs, some of which have formed in old marl or gravel workings; a small marsh; both old and secondary woodland, and notably some aspen groves; and blackthorn thickets.

Several areas of former heath have been cleared in recent years and are showing an increasing growth of heather and broom. They have attracted yellowhammers and whitethroats to nest, and green tiger beetles. Other birds nesting in the reserve include nightingale, blackcap, great spotted and green woodpeckers.

It has a wide variety of flowers, including heathland species such as tormentil and heath milkwort and wetland species like marsh willowherb, fine-leaved water-dropwort, pennywort and common and lesser skullcap. Seven different species of sphagnum moss can be found in the bogs.

It is rich in insects, including the green hairstreak butterfly. Brimstone butterflies make a fine spectacle in spring because of the many alder buckthorn trees, foodplant of its caterpillars. The ponds support many dragonfly species, including the hairy dragonfly and the scarce emerald damselfly, and all three native species of newt.

It is a special place for reptiles, including adders. Dormice are still hanging on, although not doing as well as they used to.

The common is on both sides of Bicknacre Road, which runs south from Danbury. Turn off the A414 at Eve's Corner and follow Penny Royal Road to Bicknacre Road. The entrance track to Backwarden is on the right beyond the National Trust car park (on the left).

Chelmsford–Maldon bus to Eve's Corner, and take the road sign-posted Danbury Common and Bicknacre. (Chelmsford–S. Woodham Ferrers bus passes the common.)

Accessible at all times.

May for birdsong; May–September for wild flowers (July–September for heathland plants).

Please keep dogs under strict control.

Brimstone

Barnes Spinney

2ac/1ha OS Ex184 TM 258 277

A small garden at Walton-on-the-Naze, left to Essex Wildlife Trust in 1984 by Mrs L. Barnes and named in memory of her husband, the Rt Hon. Alfred Barnes PC.

It contains fine displays of cultivated plants – especially fritillaries, daffodils and primroses in spring – and also of wild flowers, including tway-blade and good numbers of common spotted orchid.

On arriving in Walton, follow the main road north-east through High Street into Hall Lane, then on for about 800m. Turn sharp left into lane beyond Brenalwood nursing home.

Half-hourly buses from Walton church and from the bus station on the front.

Can normally be visited only on open days. These are announced and publicised locally, or call Essex Wildlife Trust on 01621 862960.

Unsuitable for dog-walking.

Bedfords Park

215ac/87ha OS Ex175 TQ 518 924 LNR Visitor Centre

Bedfords Park was enclosed in the 15th century and the manor house and gardens were laid out around it later. It was acquired by the local council in 1933, but the house fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1959. Now, it is managed as an urban park by London Borough of Havering.

The upper section has all the scenic grandeur of landscaped parkland, with its exotic trees, its deer enclosure and its close-mown slopes. The lower section is managed for wildlife, with hay meadows and some mature woodland and scrub. The area of marsh to the east of the north–south bridleway is fed by springs seeping out at the top of the slope. Beyond it is a large meadow which is one of the finest flower-rich grasslands in Essex. Here you will find cuckoo flower, pignut and ragged robin flowering in spring, and later sneezewort and pepper saxifrage.

Birdlife is varied with many warbler species arriving in summer to breed, particularly in the scrub and woodland in the south of the park. A wide variety of dragonflies can be seen around the lake and ponds in summer.

The visitor centre is run by Essex Wildlife Trust, and commands superb views over much of east London and into Kent. It incorporates many sustainable features by reusing parts of the earlier building, incorporating high insulation and using modern roof design such as the suspended stonecrop roof.

Cuckoo flower (or Lady's smock)

Tony Gunton

The main entrance to the park is off Broxhill Road, which runs north from the junction of Lower Bedfords Road, Noak Hill Road and Straight Road up to Havering-atte-Bower village.

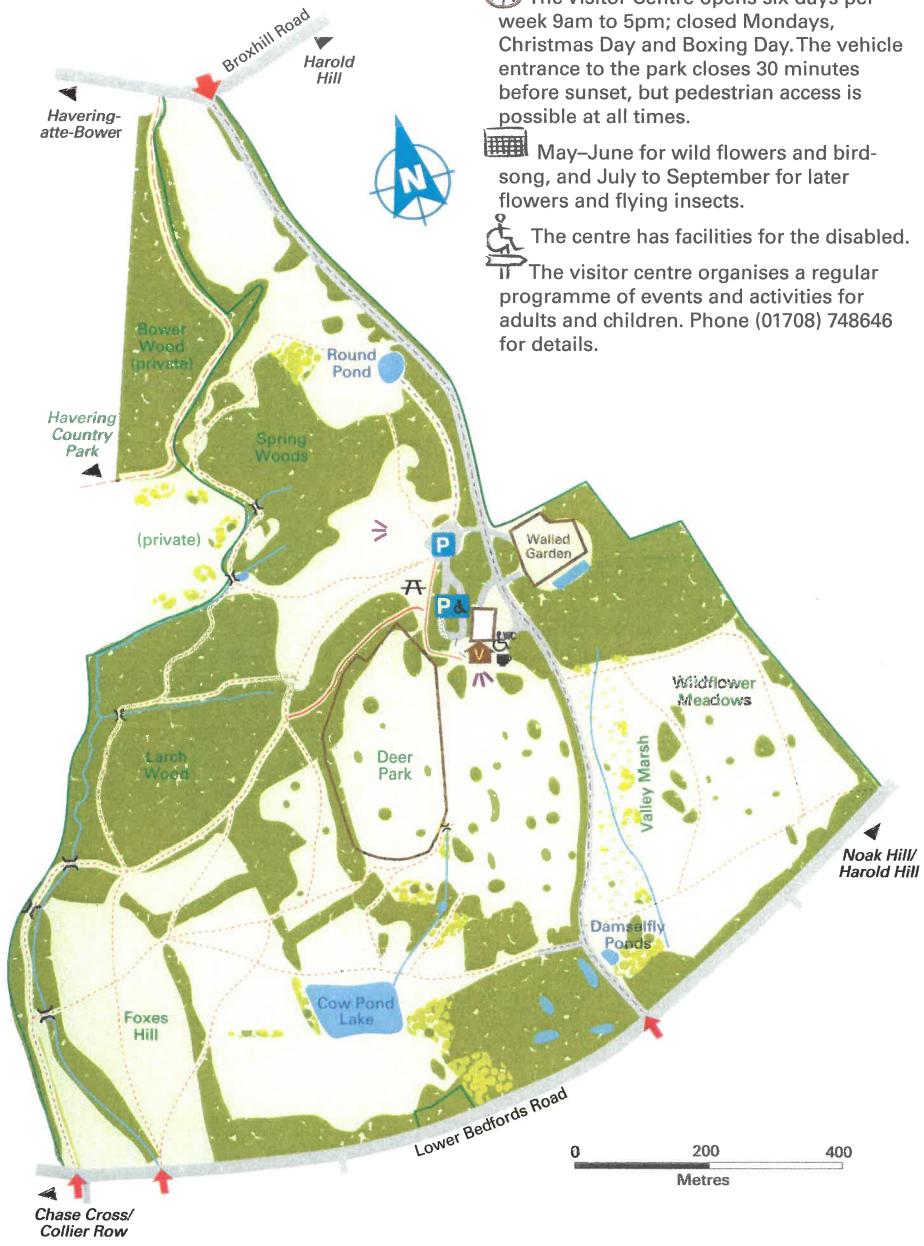
Frequent bus services run from Romford station (Liverpool St line) to the bottom end of the park on Lower Bedfords Road. Occasional services run to Havering-atte-Bower past the main entrance.

The Visitor Centre opens six days per week 9am to 5pm; closed Mondays, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The vehicle entrance to the park closes 30 minutes before sunset, but pedestrian access is possible at all times.

May–June for wild flowers and bird-song, and July to September for later flowers and flying insects.

The centre has facilities for the disabled.

The visitor centre organises a regular programme of events and activities for adults and children. Phone (01708) 748646 for details.



Blue House Farm

601ac/240ha OS Ex175-6 TQ 856 971 SSSI (part), SPA

Take the B1012 east from South Woodham Ferrers and after about 3 miles turn right to North Fambridge. Access is via a track on the left off Fambridge Road, 400m south of the railway overbridge.

A regular train service runs to Fambridge via Wickford.

Accessible at all times.

Mid-October–March for brent geese and wintering wildfowl; April–June for breeding birds and for hares.

No dogs on the permissive footpath, please. Please keep dogs under strict control elsewhere.

Please take care to close gates behind you as this is a working farm as well as a nature reserve.

at the reserve or from Essex Wildlife Trust visitor centres. For more information call the warden on 01621 740687.

Blue House Farm was bought by Essex Wildlife Trust in 1998 with support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and many other donors. Most of the farm was originally saltmarsh until seawalls were constructed to capture land from the sea. It was then used as grazing pasture, this practice continuing today. Some of the higher, drier fields were used for crops but have now reverted to grassland.

Its wildlife is internationally important, particularly overwintering birds and also coastal plants and insects. It is a working farm, managed by maintaining high water levels and balancing good livestock farming with good conservation practice.

The **flat fields** between the farmhouse and the seawall are used in winter as a feeding ground by brent geese. Often more than 2,000 geese are seen, grazing on the short turf. Throughout the year hares are abundant across the farm but are most easily seen on these fields where cover is scarce. Skylarks also thrive here, particularly in the hay fields where they nest.

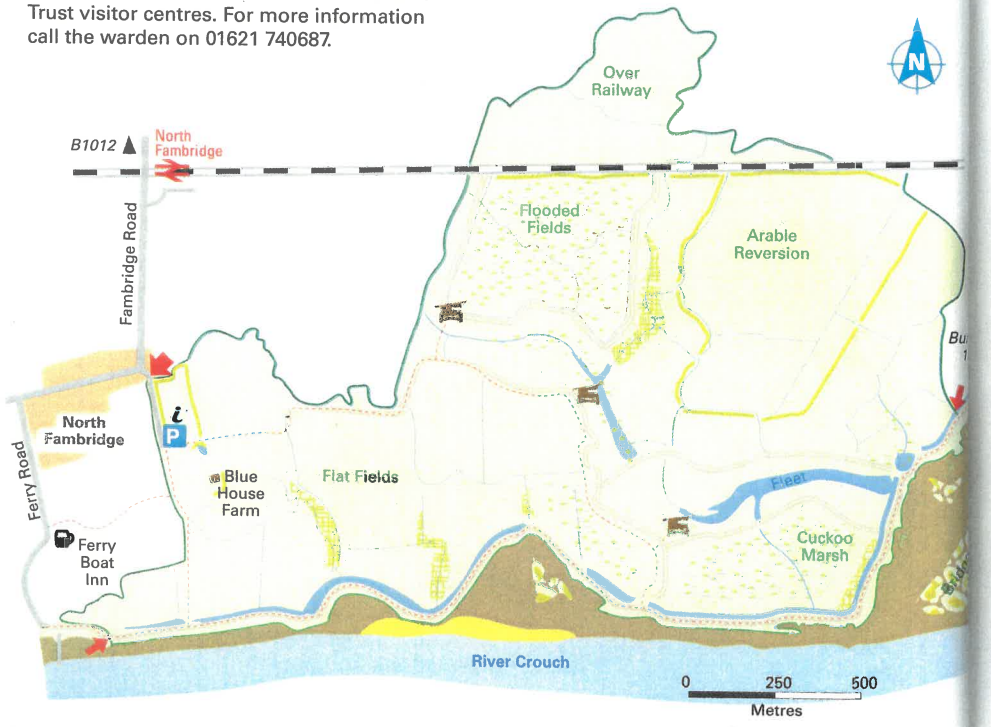
The deep water in the **fleets** attracts diving birds including tufted duck and little grebe. Our smallest duck, the teal, and our largest, the shelduck, are both commonly seen here. At high tide wading birds move in from the mudflats beyond the sea wall.

Most of the pasture has never been ploughed and retains the features of the original saltmarsh, such as winding creeks and countless hollows and bumps often topped with the large anthills of the meadow ant. The **creeks and ditches** are important habitats for rare water beetles and other insects like the hairy dragonfly and scarce emerald damselfly. Those with thick vegetation support water voles and may in time again give shelter to otters, known to have lived here until at least 1963.

The **marshy fields** attract wading birds such as redshank, curlew and snipe to feed. Fifty acres near the railway are flooded every winter, attracting overwintering wildfowl and waders and particularly wigeon and teal. As water levels drop in spring, bare mud rich in insects is exposed. Lapwing and redshank chicks eat insects and this has brought breeding lapwing and redshank back on to the farm.

The **former arable** is now grazed and supports breeding yellow wagtails and corn buntings, plus the occasional grey partridge.

The saltmarsh and intertidal mud between seawall and river provide abundant food for wading birds such as oystercatcher and black-tailed godwit. In the river itself you will often see red-breasted merganser and cormorant and occasionally common seal, feeding on the rich marine life of the estuary.



Bradwell Shell Bank

200ac/80ha OS Ex176 TM 035 081 SSSI, SPA, SAC

This nature reserve on the Dengie peninsula consists of some 30 acres of shell bank, together with extensive saltmarsh. The shell bank is continuous between Tip Head and Gunner's Creek, but further south consists of a series of small cockle spits, many of which are separated by deep creeks and gullies. The adjoining saltmarsh in some places is several hundred metres wide.

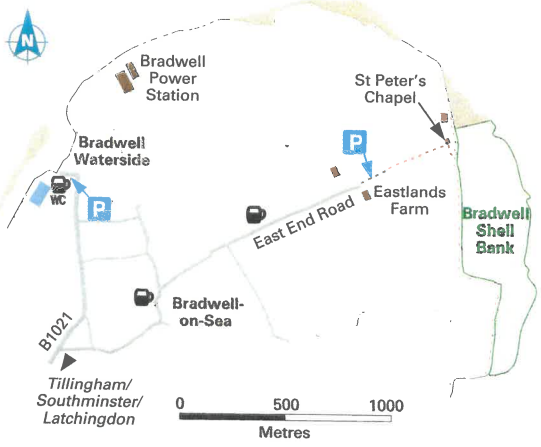
The reserve is run jointly by Essex Wildlife Trust and the Essex Birdwatching Society. The latter also operates Bradwell Bird Observatory, situated in the grounds of Linnett's Cottage on the edge of the reserve.

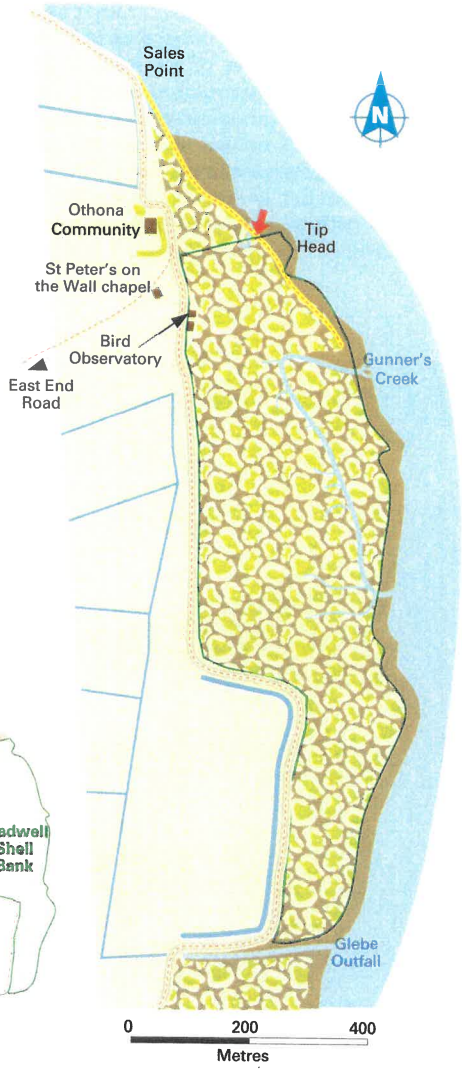
Ringed plovers and oystercatchers breed on the shell banks, and the saltmarsh supports a wide variety of species including redshank, yellow wagtail, meadow pipit, reed bunting and linnet. In autumn and winter large flocks of up to 20,000 waders roost on the reserve at high tide. Snow bunting, shorelark and lapland bunting are occasional winter visitors.

A wide range of raptors frequent the area, among them hen harrier, merlin, peregrine and short-eared owl in winter; marsh harrier, sparrowhawk and hobby at other seasons.

The more stable parts of the shell banks are rich in flowers, including yellow horned-poppy, narrow-leaved birdsfoot trefoil, grass-leaved orache, sea rocket, sea holly, marram grass and occasional clumps of the locally rare sea kale. A wide range of specialised species can be found on the saltmarsh.

The mud and sandflats to the east of the reserve, extending some 3km from the shore, are part of the Dengie National Nature Reserve. These are internationally important for overwintering waders, and notably for grey plover, knot and bar-tailed godwit. Sales Point is a good spot from which to watch waders feeding, ideally when the tide is rising to cover the mudflats. As well as the waders just mentioned, you may see dunlin, redshank, oystercatcher and curlew.





Head for Bradwell-on-Sea (a mile inland!) via Latchingdon or Southminster, following the B1010/B1018/B1021 from Chelmsford or Maldon. Turn right in Bradwell by the church and follow East End Road to its end and park at Eastlands Farm. The reserve is entered via the Saxon chapel of St Peter's on the Wall – a distance of about 800m from there. To reach the reserve, walk northwards along the seawall to Sales Point, then southwards along the public beach to Tip Head Creek. This can be crossed quite easily at low tide and gives access to the first few hundred yards of the reserve, as far south as Gunners' Creek. *This creek is wide, with deep mud in parts, and no attempt should be made to cross it!*

Accessible at all times. If you want to see waders, time your visit to coincide with high tide. At Bradwell this is just before Southend and about 90 minutes before London Bridge.

Access for the disabled can be arranged through the warden: call 01277 354034 or Essex Wildlife Trust on 01621 862960.

In order to protect breeding shorebirds, between April and August inclusive please keep to the seawall overlooking the reserve, or where no wall exists to the edge of the saltmarsh.

As you continue along the seawall you may also find turnstone, sanderling and ringed plover. Flocks of brent geese could be on the fields, the mud or the sea. The small thicket between the Bird Observatory and Sales Point is used as a refuge by many migrating birds.

The barges sunk just offshore are there to protect the saltmarsh and seawall from erosion.

Grey plover

Ringed plover

Brookes Reserve

59ac/24ha OS Ex195 TL 808 268 SSSI (part)

This nature reserve, owned by the Coda Wildlife Trust and managed by Essex Wildlife Trust, comprises over 40 acres of ancient woodland and some 18 acres of former arable fields, part of which has been planted up with native trees. The woods are known locally as Brooks's Woods, and the reserve is named after Thomas Brookes, the 18th-century owner.

Most of the wood is ash and hazel coppice. Areas of small-leaved lime and hornbeam add variety, and there are also more than 20 wild service trees. A network of historic green lanes, one a bridleway, crosses the woods. Thirteen ponds and the wet surface are evidence of the chalky boulder clay soil.

Bramble, pendulous sedge and dog's mercury dominate the ground flora, with primrose over large areas. Some notable species are greater butterfly orchid, tway-blade, herb paris, sweet woodruff, wood small reed, hard shield fern, narrow buckler fern and at least six different species of sedge.

Nuthatch and treecreeper nest on the reserve along with many summer migrant songbirds. Brown hares and large herds of fallow deer are often seen.

The wood is coppiced on rotation to produce firewood.

Between Stisted and Greenstead Green north-east of Braintree: from Greenstead Green the reserve is 2km down on the right and from Stisted 3km down on the left just past Tumbler's Green.

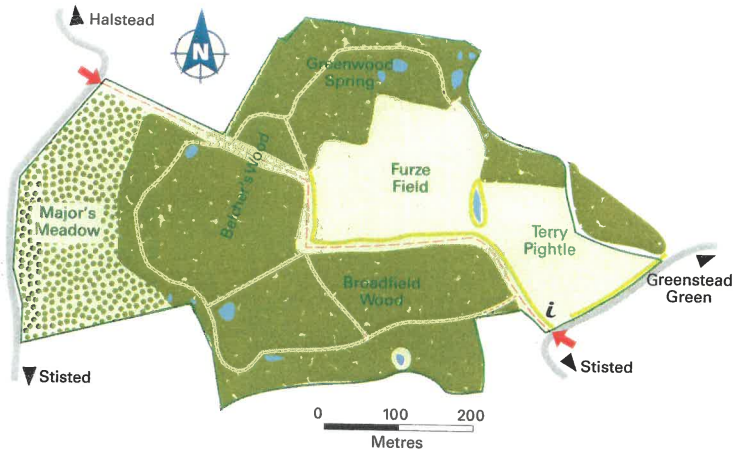
Hourly bus service Halstead–Braintree.

Accessible at all times.

For songbirds, a sunny morning in April/May; a warm summer afternoon for butterflies; early October for autumn colours.

Please keep dogs on a lead.

Please do not let children play near ponds as they could be dangerous. Please keep to the paths. Waterproof footwear essential in wet weather.



Chafford Gorges Nature Park

163ac/66ha OS Ex162 TQ 597 795 SSSI (part)

V Visitor Centre

Chafford Gorges Nature Park lies at the heart of the Chafford Hundred housing development in Grays Thurrock, near the Lakeside Shopping Centre. It consists of former chalk quarries known as Warren Gorge, Lion Gorge and Grays Gorge, together with connecting land.

Much of it has chalky soil and as a result it has a great number of plants that like alkaline conditions, including kidney vetch, bladder campion and many orchids. As well as chalky soil, it has some sandy and gravelly areas and these support a large number of unusual insects. The large lakes, the woodland and the chalk cliffs provide habitats for a wide range of other animals, including great crested newts, bats (at least 5 species), kingfishers and sand martins.

Kidney vetch

Accessed from the A1012 to Grays via Devonshire Road and Drake Road. The A1012 can be reached from the A13 east of where it meets the M25 at junction 30.

Nearest train stations are Grays and Chafford Hundred with regular bus services from both: nearest bus stop is opposite medical centre on Drake Road. Half-hourly bus service from Upminster station to Grays: get off opposite the supermarket and follow the footpath round Warren Gorge to the visitor centre.

Nature park accessible at all times. Visitor centre open daily 9am to 5pm, except Mondays, Christmas Day and Boxing Day. The car park closes at 5 pm.

Something of interest at all times of the year, but come in June or July for a spectacular display of wild flowers, later in the summer for butterflies and dragonflies, or on warm summer evenings to watch bats over the lakes.

Dogs on a lead in Lion Gorge please. All waste to be bagged and binned.

Good surfaced paths in Warren Gorge and Lion Gorge but some steep inclines to negotiate.

For more information contact the visitor centre on 01375 484016. Leaflets available at the centre.

Warren Gorge

This is the largest gorge and can be viewed and accessed from the Trust's visitor centre that overlooks it, and from the cycle path that runs around most of its perimeter.

Much of the meadow in the base of the gorge has been translocated from chalk meadows on land near Chafford Hundred station that has now been developed. It is managed to encourage the rare plants likely to be in the seed bank in the soil. In summer you can see pyramidal and common spotted orchids, yellow rattle and kidney vetch.

In summer you may hear reed and cetti's warblers singing in the reeds, or see kingfishers, hobbies or house martins feeding in or above the lake. In winter the gorge is visited by birds such as siskin, redpoll, pintail and pochard.

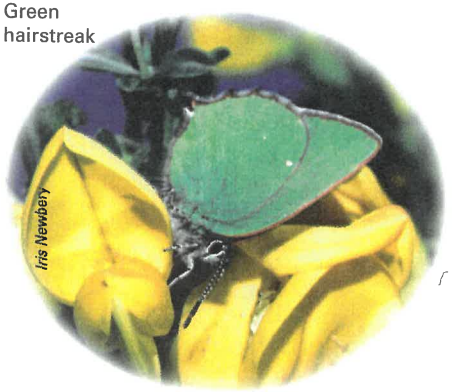
Lion Gorge

The large lake supports a variety of species of fish, including tench, rudd, pike and bream. A community-led fishing club manages the water and habitats under guidance from the Trust.

This gorge is also important for bats: four different species have been recorded here and they make a spectacular show feeding over the lake on warm summer nights. A grille has been fitted over the entrance to the tunnel leading to Warren Gorge to protect the bats that roost inside.

The cliffs at the southern end have important Pleistocene Thames deposits containing many fossils.

Green hairstreak



Marbled white

Grays Gorge

This gorge is well known locally for its great range of wild flowers, including nine different species of orchid. Other unusual plants that grow here include common milkwort, fairy flax and autumn gentian. It is important also for butterflies, including green hairstreak and holly blue, and a number of nationally important species of bee, wasp and beetle.

Major restoration works are planned to create additional grassland on the floor of the gorge to increase diversity of plants and combat invertebrate decline.

A path runs around the top of the gorge and along here you can see good numbers of pyramidal and man orchids in June. The meadow at the far end has adderstongue fern and is a good spot to see marbled white butterflies, flying from late June to mid-August.

Chigborough Lakes

46ac/18ha OS Ex183 TL 877 086

This is one of a number of worked-out flooded gravel pits to the north of the Blackwater Estuary. It lies on a thin layer of sands and gravels on top of London Clay, and as a result the lakes are shallow. The western compartment was left unrestored after extraction resulting in a more varied topography than the restored eastern section. Its wide variety of habitats include willow carr, open water, small ponds, marshy areas, grazed grassland and blackthorn/hawthorn scrub.

Extraction has left some low-nutrient areas with interesting flowers, such as common spotted and bee orchids, heath speedwell, common stork's-bill and wild strawberry. Trees of note include a single wild service tree, a veteran oak pollard and two recently planted black poplar. It has eleven 'varieties' of willow, including almond and purple willow and several recently pollarded cricket-bat willows.

Over 120 species of bird have been recorded, and more than 40 of these have bred at some time, including great crested and little grebes, little egret, grey heron and kingfisher. The reserve has also seen recent increases in cetti's warbler and smew. Other birds of interest include hobby, bullfinch and barn owl.

Grass snakes can be seen and common lizards appreciate the log piles. Most of the common butterflies and dragonflies can be seen in summer. Harvest mice have been recorded also.

About a mile up the B1026 from Heybridge towards Tolleshunt d'Arcy, turn north into Chigborough road. Continue past the fishery entrance and Chigborough Farm buildings, until you see the entrance gate to Chigborough Quarry. The reserve entrance is about 50m beyond this, on the left.

Buses from Colchester to Maldon Leisure Centre run along the B1026.

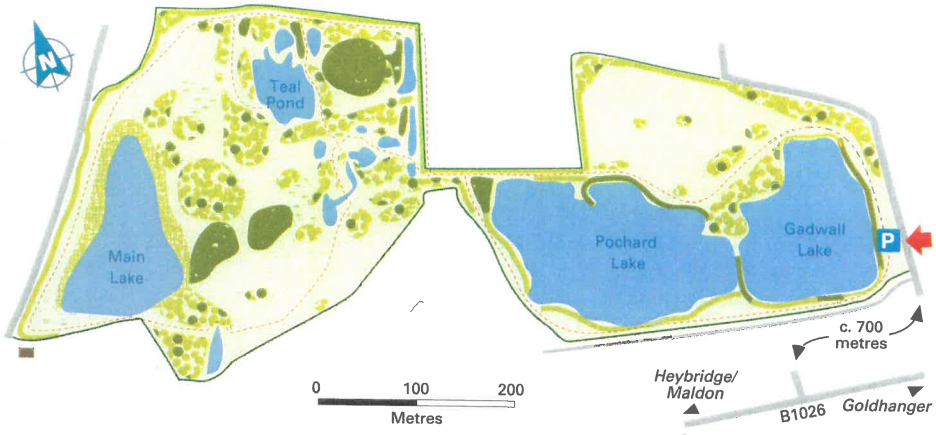
Accessible at all times.

April–July for birds, flowers and butterflies; October–February for wintering wildfowl.

Please keep dogs on leads when there is livestock on the reserve.

Easy-access path leads north from car park to a seat overlooking Gadwall Lake.

from Essex Wildlife Trust visitor centres.



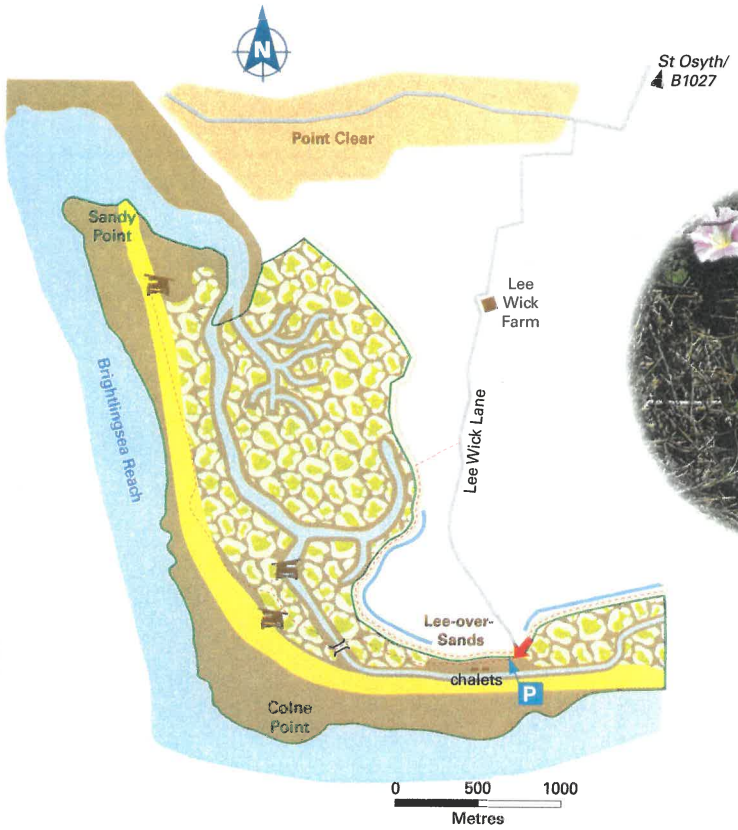
Colne Point

683ac/273ha OS Ex184 TM 108 125 NNR, SSSI, SPA

This large and important reserve at the mouth of the Colne Estuary consists of a shingle ridge enclosing a considerable area of saltmarsh, through which Ray Creek flows. The shingle and sand is nearly all that remains of a much larger area between Walton-on-the-Naze and St Osyth that existed at the end of the 19th century but has now mostly been developed by the holiday industry.

For anyone wishing to explore the movement of shingle and the development of shingle structures, Colne Point is of great interest. It is the best developed spit on the Essex coast and includes various stages of stabilisation.

The reserve is rich in plants and animals, including many that are rare nationally or locally. The saltmarsh is a typical example of the habitat in Essex and supports golden samphire and small cord-grass (both nationally scarce) as well as sea wormwood, sea lavender and thrift. The shingle and sand ridge has many attractive plants which are now highly localised, such as sea holly, sea bindweed, sea spurge, yellow horned-poppy and sea kale. Nationally scarce species include sea heath, dune fescue, curved hard-grass, sea barley and rock sea-lavender. The stands of shrubby seablite are some of the best on the east coast.



Sea bindweed

The exposed mudflats, shell banks and shingle pools provide a feeding ground for large numbers of waders that arrive in autumn and winter. Colne Point is on a major migration route for finches, chats, pipits, skylarks and hirundines and in autumn when the weather conditions are right birds constantly stream through the reserve. Birds of prey are seen frequently, particularly at migration times.

The saltmarsh is used as a winter feeding ground by brent geese and various ducks, with grebes and divers offshore. In summer there is a small nesting colony of little terns, on the shingle with oystercatchers and ringed plovers. Other breeding birds include redshank, skylark, reed bunting and linnet.

The reserve is important as well for its invertebrates, with particularly good numbers of spiders, beetles and moths recorded. A variety of solitary bees and wasps find the sandy substrate ideal for nesting. Many of these invertebrates are rare, nationally or locally, and a number of Red Data Book species (the rarest of the rare) are present.

Access via the road running to Lee Wick Farm from St Osyth. A car parking space is provided just inside the reserve on the seaward side of the sea wall, but is liable to flood at very high tides. Please use the car park and do not drive along the track past the chalets which the Trust does not own. Please drive slowly and leave all gates as you find them.

Except for Essex Wildlife Trust members access is by day permit only, available from Trust HQ (01621 862960).

Migration periods for birds; summer for saltmarsh plants and insects.

Dogs not permitted.

During the breeding season (March to September) please walk below the last high tide mark as eggs and chicks are extremely difficult to see and are easily trampled.

At high tides various parts of the reserve can be flooded for some time, including around the car park and either end of the footbridge (the only access to the main part of the reserve), so consult a tide table before you visit. It is advisable to wear wellingtons or waterproof boots as it may be muddy, or even necessary to wade, at any time of year.

Copperas Wood

34.3ac/14ha OS Ex184 TM 199 312 SSSI

This ancient wood consists mainly of coppiced sweet chestnut and hornbeam. It was severely damaged in the great storm of 1987 and sections of the wood have been left in their devastated state for wildlife value and for scientific study.

After the Trust bought the wood in 1980 coppicing was reintroduced, and this has produced carpets of bluebell, yellow archangel and red campion. Among other flowering plants are moschatel, climbing corydalis, and a few sweet woodruff and vervain. The wood is rich in ferns, and in particular soft shield-fern.

100 species of bird (43 of which have nested) have been seen, including all three species of woodpecker and the nightingale.

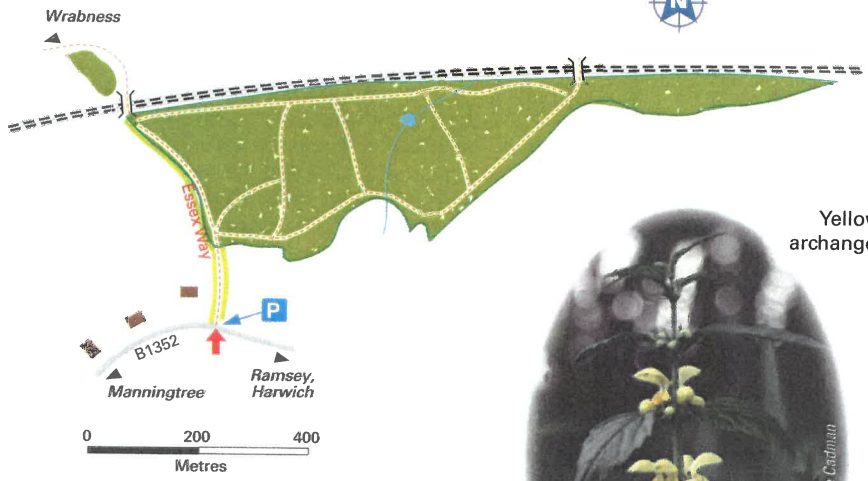
Purple hairstreak is notable among the 23 species of butterfly and over 300 species of moth that have been recorded.

North of the B1352 from Ramsey to Manningtree, between the villages of Wrabness and Ramsey. Turn off the A120 Colchester–Harwich road on to the B1352. Copperas Wood is 300m down a public footpath (the route of the Essex Way) beside a large white flat-roofed house, with parking for one or two cars on the verge.

About 2km walk from Wrabness station via public footpaths. Buses from Colchester to Harwich via Wrabness run along the B1352.

Accessible at all times.

May and June, when wild flowers are everywhere and birds are in full voice.



Yellow archangel

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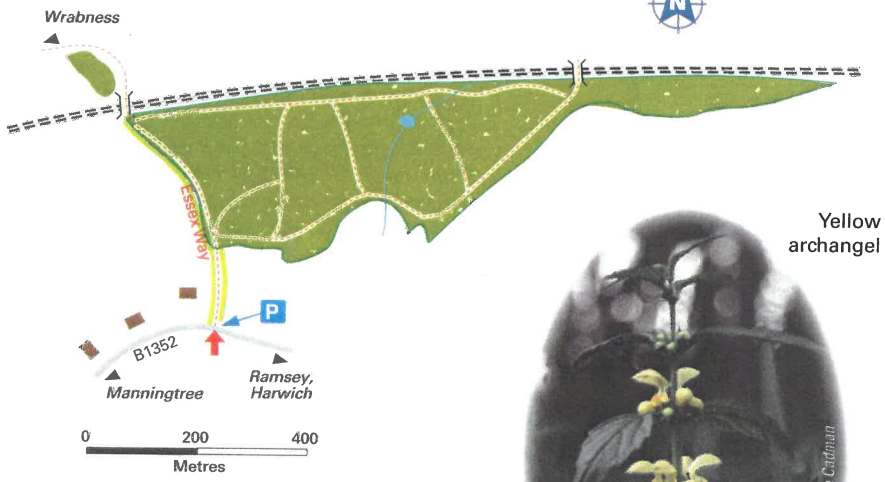


Yellow archangel

Cranham Marsh

32ac/13ha OS Ex175 TQ 567 856 LNR

Cranham Marsh is all that remains of a marshland habitat that once covered many square miles of southern Essex, but which has now mostly been converted to arable farming. It contains a variety of habitats including marsh, sedge fen (one of the best surviving in Essex) and ancient woodland.

The three small woods consist mainly of hazel coppice, with some very large oak and ash trees, patches of wild cherry and a grove of alder. Dogwood, guelder rose, spindle and midland hawthorn are also found here, indicating that it is very old woodland.

The grassland across the south of the reserve is bisected by old reed-filled drainage ditches. It contains a large concentration of betony and, in the wetter patches, southern marsh orchids, marsh marigold and ragged robin. It also has three large patches of the rare yellow loosestrife.

The reserve attracts marshland birds such as sedge warbler and reed bunting, with green and great spotted woodpeckers and tawny owl in the woods. Kestrel and sparrowhawk nest in the large trees regularly, and sometimes hobby.

Grass snakes are often seen in the grassland and there is abundant insect life. Twenty-three butterfly species have been recorded, including small copper, wall brown, purple hairstreak and speckled wood.

Because of changes in land use around the marsh it is not as wet as it used to be. To make the most of the available water, dams have been built along the main stream. For the grassland and fen a combination of cutting and grazing is used to create a mosaic of varying habitats. Parts of the woods are being coppiced on a 12-year cycle.

Yellow loosestrife

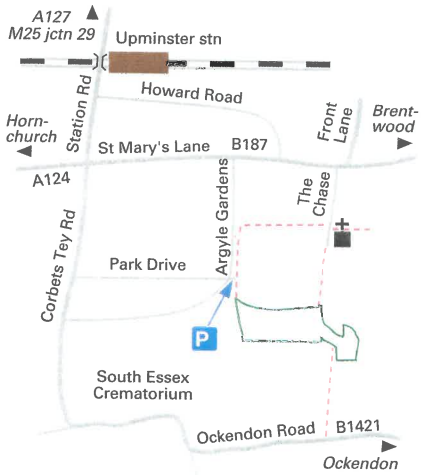
Access via Argyle Gardens or The Chase, both of which run south off St Mary's Lane (B187), with footpaths leading on to the reserve.

Upminster station is about 20 minutes walk. Bus 248 from Upminster station runs along St Mary's Lane.

Accessible at all times.

April and May for early flowers and birdsong; July and August for later flowers and insects.

Please keep dogs on a lead near livestock and under control elsewhere.



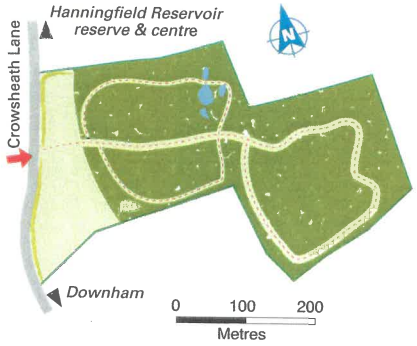
Crowsheath Wood

20ac/8ha OS Ex175 TQ 724 965

An ancient coppice woodland, with three acres of adjoining open land. The many mature standard oak trees are an impressive feature of the wood. The coppice trees are mainly hornbeam, with a little ash, midland hawthorn, field maple and wild service. Much of the western part of the wood has been coppiced in recent years, and some broadleaved trees have been replanted. Coppicing is being extended to enhance wildlife interest.

Flowers include bluebell, wood anemone, primrose, pignut and ragged robin. Lesser spearwort grows in the ponds near the centre.

Most of the bird species typical of lowland broadleaved woodland are present. Several species of warbler (including sedge warbler), woodpeckers, nuthatch and nightingale have been recorded.



Access from Crowsheath Lane, which runs south towards Downham from the road causeway across Hanningfield Reservoir. Within easy walking distance of Hanningfield Reservoir nature reserve and visitor centre.

Buses from Ramsden Heath to Wickford via Downham stop at the southern end of the lane.

Accessible at all times.

Spring for flowers and visiting birds; autumn for a good selection of fungi.

Crowsheath Wood is marked as Thrift Wood on many maps – Essex Wildlife Trust adopted a local name to avoid confusion with its Thrift Wood reserve at Bicknacre.

Danbury Ridge

250ac/100ha OS Ex183 TL 775 064 SSSI (part)

Essex Wildlife Trust manages a block of nearly 250 acres of nature reserves on Danbury Ridge, a mosaic of woodland, common and heathland, streams and bogs.

Woodham Walter Common, a gravel-covered plateau sloping down to stream valleys on both sides, forms the eastern section. It is principally secondary woodland, with a few areas that are being kept open to encourage low-growing plants, and especially ling heather. It is noted for its sessile oak trees, with many rowan and a scattering of wild service and alder buckthorn.

Birch Wood at its northern corner consists mainly of hornbeam coppice, worked on a 20-year cycle. In spring there is a superb display of flowers, including wood anemones, wood spurge, wood sorrel and climbing corydalis. The wood also contains a colony of the unusual golden-scaled fern.

Pheasanthouse Wood to the west is mixed woodland with a raised bog. This has dense hummocks of sphagnum moss, and large numbers of the rare lesser skullcap.

Little Baddow Heath forms most of the southern section, descending steeply from north and south to a superb stream valley containing primrose, fen bedstraw, ragged robin and several species of fern, and alive with insects in summer. North of the stream was once grass heathland that has developed into secondary woodland over the past 20–30 years. A section has been restored and here can be found many wild flowers, including unusual plants such as heath milkwort and goldenrod.

Poors Piece sits in the angle to the west of Little Baddow Heath. It contains many oak pollards, suggesting that it was once used as wood pasture. In its southern corner is a marsh full of wetland plants, and notably hemp agrimony, hop sedge and lady fern.

The southernmost tip is Scrubs Wood, consisting mainly of hornbeam and chestnut coppice with oak standards, plus some wild service trees. It is fairly flat except for the gently sloping bank on its southern boundary which has a fine display of wood anemones.

Peter Batey

Other flowering plants include tormentil and broad-leaved helleborine.

Spring Wood, added most recently, is nine acres of secondary woodland towards the south-west corner.

Dormice, once common but now much reduced in numbers, are found in many parts of the reserve. The birdlife includes nuthatch, all three species of woodpecker, migrant warblers and, intermittently, nightingale. There are good numbers of butterflies including brimstone, ringlet and small copper.

Lily of the valley is a special feature of Danbury Ridge, and other unusual wild flowers here include yellow archangel, greater butterfly orchid and sanicle.

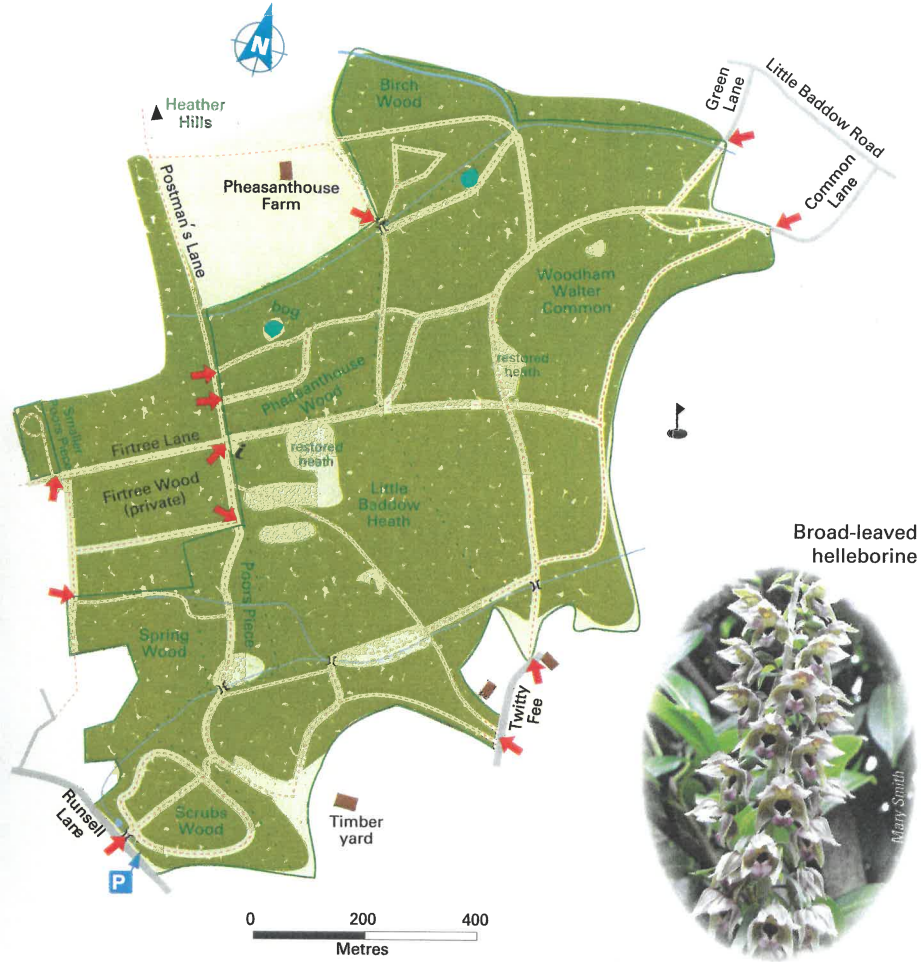
Foot access from the west via Firtree Lane, off The Ridge; from the east via Common Lane, Woodham Walter; and from the south via Twitty Fee or Runsell Lane, a turning to the right 600m along Little Baddow Road from Eve's Corner.

Regular bus services Chelmsford–Maldon and Chelmsford–S. Woodham Ferrers. Get off at Eve's Corner.

Accessible at all times.

May for breeding birds and wild flowers; June for ferns and bog plants and for butterflies; autumn for fungi.

Please keep dogs on leads when crossing Pheasanthouse Farm.



Broad-leaved helleborine

Mary Smith

Fingringhoe Wick

125ac/50ha OS Ex184 TM 041 195 SSSI, SPA (part) Visitor Centre

Fingringhoe Wick was Essex Wildlife Trust's first nature reserve, created out of disused gravel workings on the west shore of the Colne Estuary. From 40 years of gravel extraction the Trust inherited a barren moonscape. But bare gravel, clay, mud and sediments are inviting seedbeds for wild plants, and today the disturbed, undulating terrain is largely buried in woodland, thickets and dense scrub. The reserve has an immense range of habitats, including patches of grassland, gorse heathland, reedbeds and – a vital wildlife feature – ponds and a large lake. There is a mixed plantation of trees, including conifers. The river frontage provides additional habitats such as saltmarsh, foreshore and inter-tidal mudflats.

Strategically placed on sloping ground overlooking the Colne Estuary, The Wick offers one of the finest saltmarsh panoramas in eastern England.

Over 200 species of birds have been recorded, of which 50 species nest each year. Come in spring to hear the massed nightingale chorus and for other breeding migrants. Watch the ponds for the darting blue flash of a kingfisher. Kestrels nest, as well as tawny owls, little grebes and sparrowhawks. Between June and September, migrant waders find the Scrape attractive. The estuary, quiet for much of the year, comes into its own in winter. Thousands of wintering waders and wildfowl rely on the expanses of mud and saltmarsh for food or for roosting. This includes up to 700 avocets, viewable from the shore hides. Sea duck can be seen in mid-river.

You will see many rabbits and grey squirrels, and maybe a fox. There are regular sightings of brown hare, stoat and weasel. Watch out for common seals in the estuary.

At least 350 species of flowering plants have been recorded, including common spotted orchids and bee orchid. The shaded, humid conditions in the thickets suit ferns, mosses and lichens. Visit in spring for tiny unobtrusive clovers, medicks and trefoils. Summer is best for colourful species, especially sea lavender on the saltmarsh, and masses of dog roses.

The Wick teems with insect life. Thirteen species of dragonfly and damselfly breed on the reserve. Many common butterflies flourish, together with the less usual green hairstreak. The sandy, eroding cliff faces are attractive to bees, ants and wasps.

Strangely, frogs are almost unknown at The Wick, although there is a tiny breeding population of toads. Common lizards, slow worms, great crested newts and smooth newts are abundant. Adders and grass snakes are reported regularly.

On a site like this an annual programme of management is essential to let in sunlight and to create areas of new young growth. Scrub must be controlled and ponds must be maintained.

Centre facilities include gift shop offering light refreshments, toys, books, optics, bird feeders and feed, greeting cards and much more. Feeding stations are set up outside so you can relax and enjoy a hot cuppa while watching the wildlife. The observation room and Sea & Sky Observatory both offer fabulous views across the saltmarsh.

Children's activities include Gemstone Panning (£2 donation/child); Wildlife Activity Bags (£5 donation/bag), now including the 2 in 1 Family Explorers' Trail (can be purchased separately £1.50 each).

Avocet

Three miles south-east of Colchester. Take the B1025 from Colchester towards Mersea for three miles. After crossing the Roman River turn first left and follow the brown signs to the reserve. The lanes between Fingringhoe village and the reserve are narrow – please drive with caution.

Bus routes run to Fingringhoe Village only: 30–40 minute walk from there via the Fingringhoe Gravel Pit Trail.

Until the end of 2012, centre and reserve are open daily 9 am–4 pm, excluding Christmas Day and Boxing Day; thereafter, 9 am–5 pm Tuesday to Sunday. Please obtain a permit from the centre. Donations are requested from non-members of the Trust – we suggest £2/adult, £1/child and £5/family (2 adults and 2 children).

Worth visiting at any time of the year, but the highlights are the nightingale chorus in May and the flocks of brent geese in winter.

Wheelchair and mobility access to parts of the nature reserve and some bird hides; wheelchair available on request. Vehicle access permitted to selected areas of the reserve for blue badge holders. Some braille signage in the visitor centre. Large print, braille and audio "Access for All" guides available.

Dog are permitted on site, but must be kept to the dog trail and be on a lead at all times. The dog trail takes about 20 minutes and heads toward the reserve gate and back.

For details of a regular programme of events for adults and children or for any other information, call 01206 729678. Waymarked nature trails start from the centre.

Group visits of parties of more than ten people are welcome, but please advise in advance by calling 01206 729678.

Fobbing Marsh

187ac/76ha OS Ex175 TQ 716 845 SSSI (part)

One of the few remaining Thameside grazing marshes, set on the north-west edge of Fobbing Creek, part of which was dammed in the aftermath of the 1953 floods. As well as the grazing meadows it has areas of rough grassland (the largest of which is the bed of the dammed creek), saltmarsh, seawalls and an adjoining small reedbed.

Its flowering plants are typical of Thameside marshes, including hairy buttercup, knotted hedge parsley, slender hare's-ear and sea barley, together with the normal range of saltmarsh plants and, in early summer, large colourful patches of vetches and tares. It also supports corn chervil and the nationally rare least lettuce.

In summer there are many dragonflies and damselflies along the borrow dykes. The rank grass along the seawalls is a haven for grasshoppers and bush-crickets.

Corn bunting and yellow wagtail breed regularly, and the marsh is used by wintering raptors, wildfowl and waders. Visiting passage migrants include wheatear and whinchat.

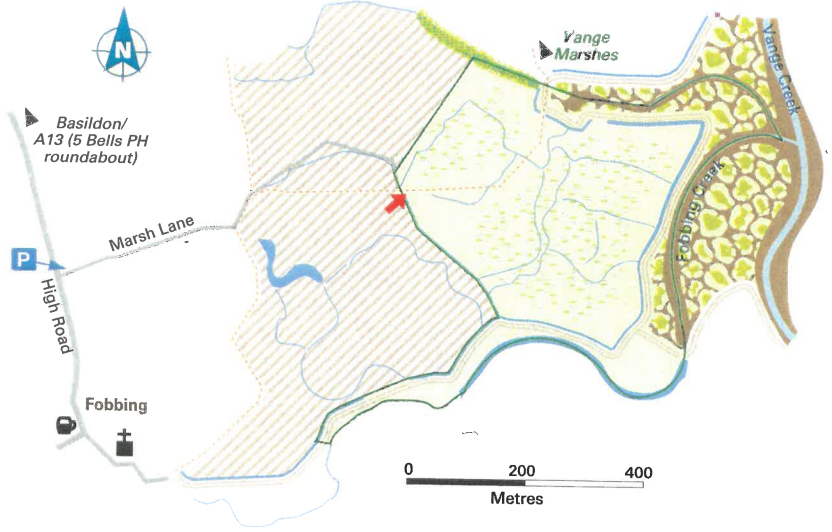
Down Marsh Lane, 800m north of Fobbing Church and about a mile from the A13. Park in Fobbing High Road near the top of Marsh Lane. Please leave the entrance to Marsh Lane clear as it is used by wide farm machinery. Walk down Marsh Lane and at the bottom take the left-hand fork and follow the track until you see the reserve noticeboard – this is almost a mile from the High Road.

A bus service from Basildon and Stanford-le-Hope stops at Marsh Lane.

Accessible at all times

December and January to see raptors and waders; March, April and September for birds on passage; summer for insects and wild flowers.

Please do not walk along the top of the seawalls as this disturbs and frightens away the wildlife.



Gernon Bushes

79ac/32ha OS Ex174 TL 478 030 SSSI

This is the last remnant of the old Coopersale Common that once linked Epping Lower Forest along the hill ridge to Ongar Park. It has many ancient hornbeam pollards plus some more recent woodland and a network of ponds originally dug for gravel extraction, and descends steeply from the plateau of the ridge across pebbly clay drift and claygate beds to London clay lower down.

In the north of the reserve the gravel workings have developed into sphagnum bogs. In the south two springs rise on the edge of the plateau and their streams descend steep-sided valleys through a series of bogs with large patches of the rare marsh fern. Other notable plants include lady fern, bogbean (in one of its very few Essex sites), marsh valerian, marsh marigold and ragged robin.

It has a good variety of resident and summer migrant birds.

Turn off the B181 towards Coopersale village and turn left on to Garnon Mead 200 yards after passing under the railway bridge.

A bus service runs to Coopersale from Harlow via Epping.

Accessible at all times

Spring for songbirds; summer for marsh and bog plants.

Bogbean

Great Holland Pits

40ac/16ha OS Ex184 TM 204 190

Except that it does not border an estuary, Great Holland Pits is in many respects a smaller version of Fingringhoe Wick. Gravel was worked here until about 1964 but the scars have virtually disappeared beneath vigorous growth. Habitats include heathy grassland, pasture, a remnant of old woodland, large and small pools, and wet depressions. From the high ground there are attractive views of Holland Brook meandering through water meadows.

It has a wide variety of flowering plants, including localised Essex species such as moschatel (also known as town hall clock), yellow archangel, small-flowered buttercup, mousetail, carline thistle, several small clovers, true bulrush, and soft shield and hart's-tongue ferns.

There is a good variety of birdlife, with the nightingale among the summer visitors, and several aquatic species including kingfisher, coot and little grebe. Woodcock frequently use the reserve in winter.

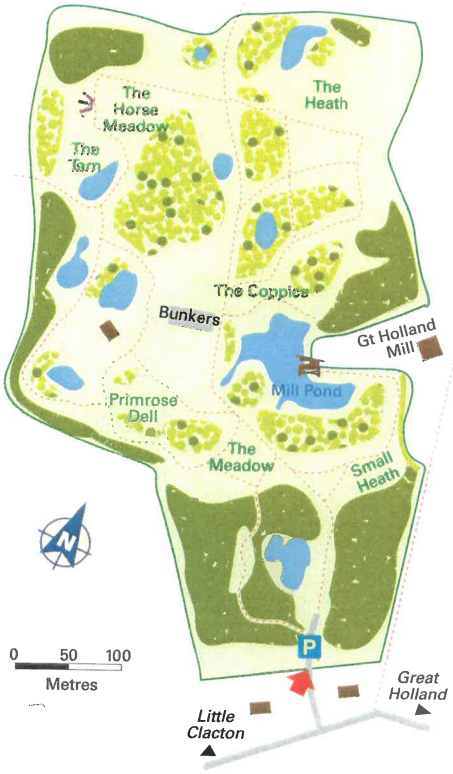
As you would expect in such a varied site, there are many butterflies, moths and other invertebrates.

The reserve entrance is 800m west of the Lion's Den pub at Great Holland, north of the Little Clacton Road.

Buses stop at the Lion's Den on the route from Clacton to Walton.

Accessible at all times, but car park daylight hours only.

Spring and summer for flowers, birds and insects.



Moschatel

Grove House Wood

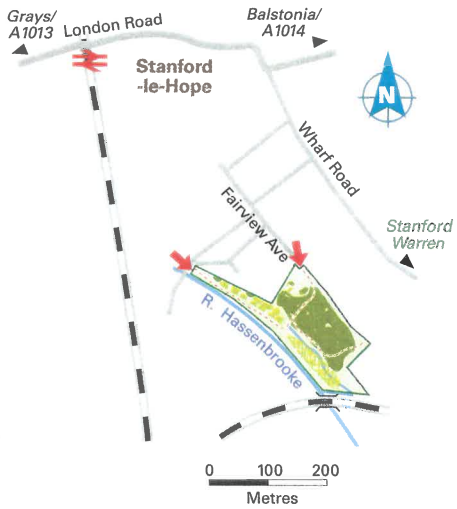
6ac/2.4ha OS Ex163/175 TQ 686 818 LNR

A small wood in Stanford-le-Hope, owned by Thurrock Council and managed by Essex Wildlife Trust. It adjoins the River Hassenbrooke, here lined with reeds and marshy areas. It supports the usual woodland birds and its dead elms provide nesting sites for woodpeckers.

Entrance from Fairview Avenue, Stanford-le-Hope. On-street parking.

Stanford railway station is a few minutes' walk away.

Accessible at all times



Hanningfield Reservoir

100ac/40ha OS Ex175 TQ 725 971 SSSI

V Visitor Centre

This mixture of ancient and secondary woodland at the south-eastern end of Hanningfield Reservoir has been managed by Essex Wildlife Trust since 1992, on lease from Essex & Suffolk Water. The reservoir itself is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its important populations of wildfowl, and is among the top places in Essex to watch birds.

The spectacle of thousands of swifts, swallows and martins feeding over the water during peak fly hatches is one of the delights for the summer visitor, although most people will probably associate the reservoir with large numbers of waterfowl. Gadwall, tufted duck and pochard are three of the important breeding species and year-round coot numbers are nationally important.

Some 30 acres of the woodland, Well Wood and Hawk's Wood, are ancient in origin. Ditch and bank boundaries dating back centuries mark the extent of the old coppice and some of the original hornbeam trees survive. There is a great diversity of wildlife, with many species indicative of ancient woodland. The show of spring flowers – bluebells, yellow archangel and stitchworts – is not to be missed. In summer, many dragonflies and damselflies can be seen around the ponds.

From the visitor centre waymarked trails lead through the woodland to four bird-watching hides. Much of the reservoir can be scanned from the hides, with especially good views over an island that is popular with wildfowl and a raft provided for terns to nest.

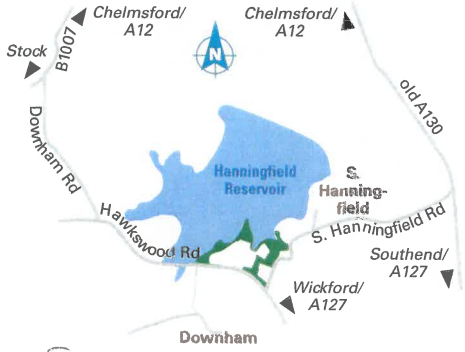
Turn off the B1007 (Billericay–Chelmsford) on to Downham Road and turn left on to Hawkswood Road. The entrance to the visitor centre is just beyond the causeway, opposite Crowsheath Lane.

Wickford–Chelmsford bus to Downham village and walk 800m down Crowsheath Lane.

Visitor centre open daily 9am–5pm except Christmas Day and Boxing Day, serving refreshments and offering a wide range of optical equipment and gifts.

April–July for breeding birds in woodland and on water and for wild flowers; winter and migration periods for wildfowl.

Disabled parking and toilets at the centre; disabled pathway runs from there to a bird hide equipped for disabled users.



Sorry, no dogs except guide dogs allowed on site.

For information on events and activities call the Centre on 01268 711001.

Harrison Sayer

2.5ac/1ha OS Ex209 TL 557 441

One of the few surviving areas of boulder clay grassland in north-west Essex, which otherwise is intensive arable farmland. Once part of a war-time airbase and now partially overgrown, it is nearly 106m above sea-level with fine views over south Cambridgeshire.

Flowering plants include bee orchid, wild liquorice, twayblade, fairy flax and blue fleabane. There are many blackthorn thickets – used by nesting birds – and wild roses.

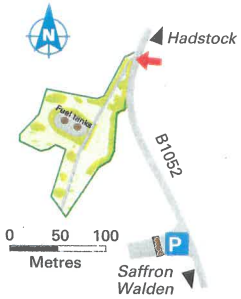
On the B1052 about 3 miles north of Saffron Walden, 800m from Hadstock – identifiable from the road by the large hangar at its rear.

Accessible at all times.

Late June for roses and bee orchids.

Unsuitable for disabled visitors.

Keep out of brick structures as there may be loose masonry.



Bee orchid

Hawksmere Springs

4.2ac/2ha OS Ex175 TQ 508 993

This small reserve is mostly ancient unimproved pasture, part of it marshy, with a tiny remnant of ancient damp woodland and a boundary stream.

The reserve is extremely rich in flowers. In the meadows grow cowslip, betony, agrimony, sneezewort, fleabane and a profusion of knapweed and meadowsweet. Yellow rattle and ragged robin can also be found. In spring, bluebells and ramsons (wild garlic) carpet the small wood.

Willow warblers and other warblers join the resident birds in summer and butterflies and other insects are numerous.

The meadows are grazed by sheep to keep them in optimum condition for wild flowers.

Access is by footpath from Tawney Lane, from about 400m east of Little Tawney Hall where there is a small 'Hawksmere Springs' sign on the roadside. Go down the embankment slope and along the grass headland with the stream on your left until you come to a bridge, leading to the reserve entrance on the other side of the stream.

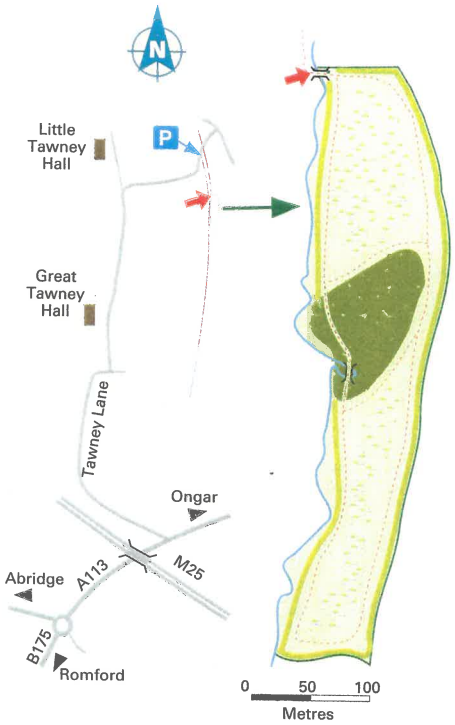
Accessible at all times.

May and June for birdsong; July and August for butterflies, when the meadows are in full bloom.

Unsuitable for wheelchairs or those with walking difficulties.

Please keep your dog on a lead on the access path and when sheep are grazing on the reserve.

Take care when parking where indicated on the verge because it is narrow and steep.



Betony

Heather Hills

16ac/6ha OS Ex183 TL 780 077

This reserve, licensed to Essex Wildlife Trust by Little Baddow Council, is divided in two by a very steep stream valley, on either side of which are slopes once covered in heather. The heather had become overgrown and retreated to the summit and edges, but the Trust is clearing overgrown areas, including parts of the stream valley, to restore it.

Its many trees and shrubs include a row of elms and stands of mature beech, scots pine and european larch. Flowers include moschatel, climbing corydalis and heath bedstraw. Several species of fern grow along the stream along with a variety of wetland plants.

On the east side of North Hill, Little Baddow. The main entrance is off North Hill, using a trackway known as York Street. Parking at St Andrews Rooms on North Hill.

Accessible at all times

Spring for early flowers; August for heather.

Take great care when descending the steep scarp to the valley floor.

Climbing corydalis

Hitchcock's Meadows

15ac/6ha OS Ex183 TL 788 049 SSSI

On hilly land adjoining Danbury Common, about half of this reserve is flower-rich ancient pasture and the remainder is secondary woodland, scrubland and marsh. In 1998 Essex Wildlife Trust acquired The Dell on the other side of Gay Bowers Lane to extend it.

The main meadow, Toot Hill, is a former lookout area from which the North Downs can be seen. It contains green-winged orchid, common and heath dog violets, eyebright, common milkwort and autumn lady's tresses, among many other plants. In Ketley's Mead you will find hoary cinquefoil, wood sage and sweetbriar.

The marsh is dominated by the bright emerald green of giant horsetail, with a patch of devilsbit scabious.

The small laneside meadow, Broken Back, has several uncommon clovers, pignut and knapweed and is excellent for butterflies.

The hedgerows and thickets harbour a good number of bird species and the reserve is rich in insect life, including glow-worms.

East of Eve's Corner, Danbury, about 200m down Gay Bowers Lane, on both sides of the road. Park in the car park on Penny Royal Road and from there walk up to the A414 and turn right, then right again into Gay Bowers Lane.

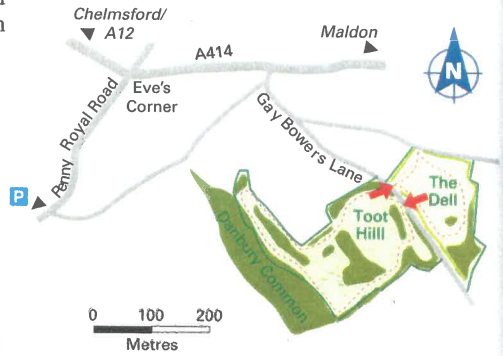
Chelmsford–Maldon or Chelmsford–S. Woodham Ferrers bus to Eve's Corner.

Accessible at all times.

Late April–September for wild flowers (plus butterflies July–August and glow-worms in July).

Leave the path if you wish, but please take care where you walk during the flowering season.

Please keep dogs on leads when there is livestock on the reserve.



Green-winged orchid

Common dog violet

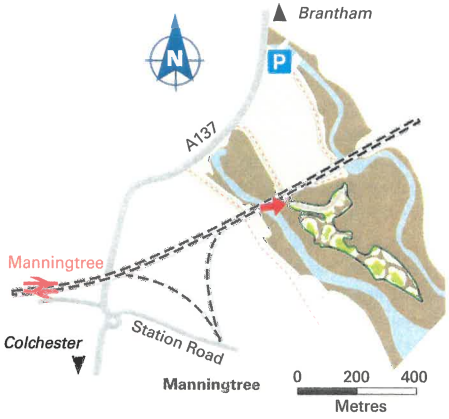
Hogmarsh

12ac/5ha OS Ex184 TM 103 325 SSSI, SPA

An area of saltmarsh jutting out into the tidal River Stour opposite Manningtree. It was donated to Essex Wildlife Trust by Lt.-Col. C.A. Brooks in 1973.

It has plants and animals typical of Essex saltmarsh. Mute swan, canada goose and oystercatcher nest and many other estuary bird species visit.

The saltmarsh is threatened by erosion and this is being fought by building faggot barriers and importing silt dredged from elsewhere in the river.



Park along the Cattawade river barrage on the A137 (Colchester–Ipswich) road, then walk south-east along the seawall and under the railway bridge.

Manningtree railway station is about 15 minutes' walk.

Can be viewed from footpaths to the north at all times. The reserve itself can only be entered at low tide.

Unsuitable for dog walking.

Very soft mud surrounds most of the reserve, so wellingtons are essential.

Horndon Meadow

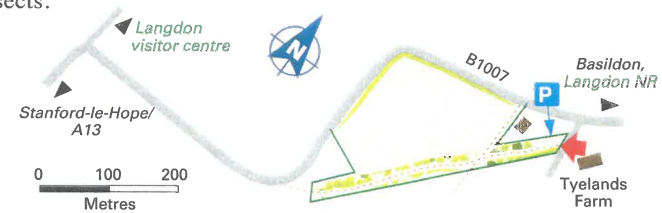
2ac/1ha OS Ex175 TQ 672 851

A small unimproved hay meadow on clay soil that has probably never been ploughed. It is important primarily for its wild flowers, holding about 80 species. The highlight is several hundred spikes of green-winged orchids in early May, with patches of adder's-tongue fern. This is followed by large amounts of yellow rattle, several patches of musk mallow, and lots of black knapweed, attracting many butterflies and other insects.

On the B1007 (Horndon-on-the-Hill–Basildon), about 2km from Horndon village. The entrance is at Tyelands Farm, from where a track leads to a gate on the right opening into the meadow. Park considerately by the track and take care when pulling out afterwards.

Accessible at all times

April to July for wild flowers.



Howlands Marsh

186ac/74ha OS Ex184 TM 115 169 SSSI, SPA

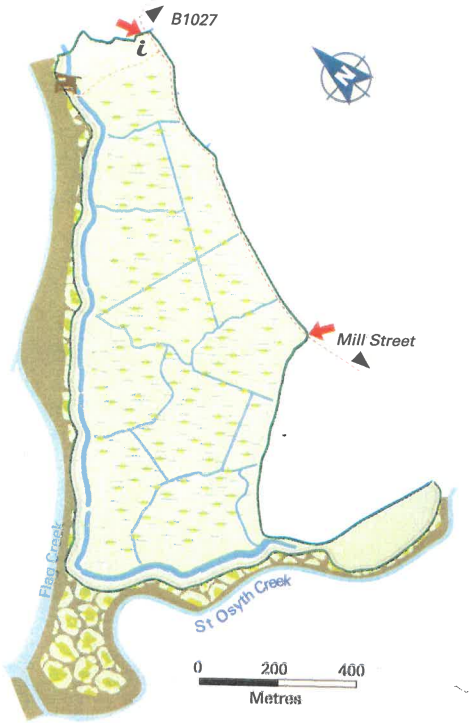
One of the best surviving coastal grazing marshes in Essex, consisting mainly of low-lying hummocky grassland, split up by dykes and fleets. The fleets and other natural depressions in the grassland are evidence of former creeks and saltmarsh before the seawall was built. A narrow fringe of salt-marsh outside the seawall widens into a large block where Flag and St Osyth creeks meet.

The grassland contains a great deal of reed, sedge, glaucous bulrush and sea clubrush, and a variety of other plants include spiny rest-harrow and, particularly on the many anthills, spring whitlow-grass. Uncommon plants such as slender hare's-ear, knotted parsley and sea barley grow on and near the seawall.

Among the plants in the dykes and fleets are great water-dock, lesser water-parsnip, tufted forget-me-not, marsh bedstraw and brackish water-crowfoot. In places on the saltmarsh are sea wormwood and some golden samphire, as well as the more usual saltmarsh plants.

Reed warblers, lapwings, skylarks and reed buntings breed here. In winter brent geese graze among hundreds of wildfowl along with small flocks of curlews. When the tide is low, large numbers of shelduck, dunlin and redshank feed on the exposed mud in the creeks. Little egrets and marsh harriers are frequent visitors.

The marshland also supports a great variety of invertebrates, including some rare species.



Reached via a public footpath which links a layby on the west side of the B1027, just south of Oaklands Holiday Village (600m from the reserve), with The Quay off Mill Street (900m away). Roadside parking is usually available.

Several bus services from Clacton-on-Sea and Colchester pass the starting points for the footpath.

Accessible at all times. The public path is often impassable for some time during high tides at and near The Quay.

September to March for wildfowl and waders on and around Flag Creek.

To prevent disturbance to wildlife and grazing stock, please keep to the public footpath and the path to the hide and do not walk on the seawall.

Dogs must be kept on a lead near livestock and always under close control.

Hunsdon Mead

68ac/27ha OS Ex174 TL 421 114 SSSI

This area of common land between the River Stort and the Stort Navigation is one of the finest surviving areas of unimproved grassland in eastern England. The Hertfordshire & Middlesex and Essex Wildlife Trusts acquired it jointly in 1981.

It provides a superb display of flowering plants. In April and May it is yellow with cowslips and marsh marigolds. As May gives way to June colours change continually, as plants such as yellow rattle, ragged robin, cuckoo flower, meadowsweet, bugle and many others flower in profusion. There are small colonies of green-winged orchid and adders-tongue fern. Quaking grass and several uncommon sedge species are also present.

In summer you can expect to see all the typical grassland butterflies, plus many mayflies and dragonflies.

During the winter, when the Mead floods, large flocks of lapwing and golden plover come to feed along with other winter migrants.

For over 600 years Hunsdon Mead has been managed on the ancient Lammas system, under which it is grazed by cattle or sheep in late summer after a July hay cut. It is this which accounts for its rich wildlife.

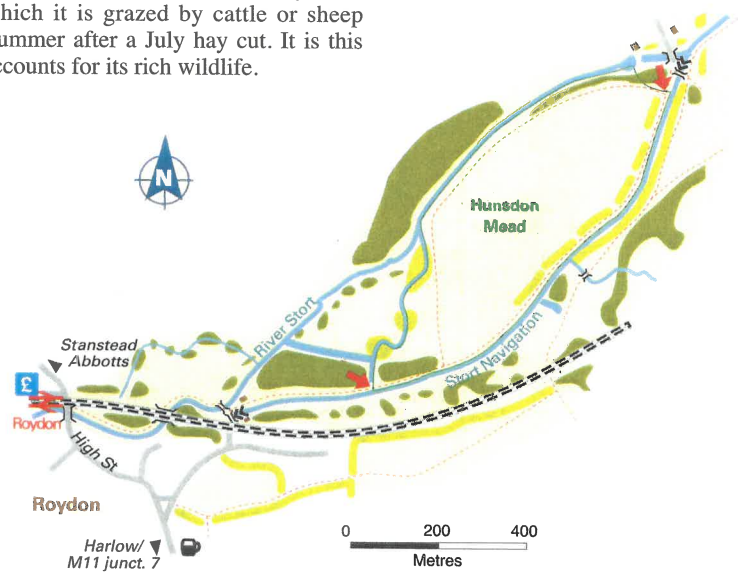
Follow the Stort Navigation towpath from Roydon in the direction of Harlow – a walk of about one mile. The easiest parking is at Roydon station.

Roydon station (Liverpool St to Cambridge).

Accessible at all times.

From mid-April until the end of June for flowers, and later in the summer for dragonflies and other insects.

Between March and July please do not walk across or into the Mead itself until the hay is cut: trampling damages the plants and reduces the value of the grass as hay for the farmer. During this period please keep to the towpath or walk in single file along the permissive path beside the River Stort.



Iron Latch

10.5ac/4ha OS Ex184 TL 951 261

This Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserve consists of a flower-rich meadow, plus four acres of woodland, long established and possibly ancient. It is quite wet in parts with a good selection of trees, especially ash.

When grazing ceased in the 1950s the meadow reverted to secondary woodland. This was cleared by the Trust in the early 1980s with the aim of recovering the species-rich grassland, which once held colonies of green-winged and common spotted orchids. Now it is managed by mowing and sheep grazing.

Wild and barren strawberry and birds-foot trefoil flower in the meadow. Birdsfoot trefoil is a foodplant of the common blue and this and several other butterfly species are a special feature. Purple hairstreaks can be seen around the hedgerow oaks.

Nightingales nest in the coppiced woodland and in the managed hedgerows, and also in the neighbouring woodland that has developed on old gravel workings.

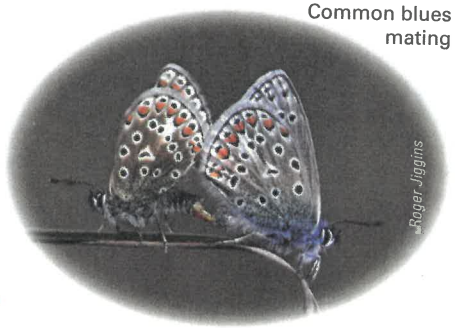
Three miles west of Colchester town centre at Eight Ash Green. Park at the south end of the service road to nos. 96–132 Halstead Road and walk up the unmade Iron Latch Lane which runs from the old Halstead road at TL 955 254. Cross over the railway bridge and continue along the lane with woodland on your left. The reserve lies to the right of the footpath at the end of the field on your right.

Buses from Colchester to Fordham and Wakes Colne run along Halstead Road.

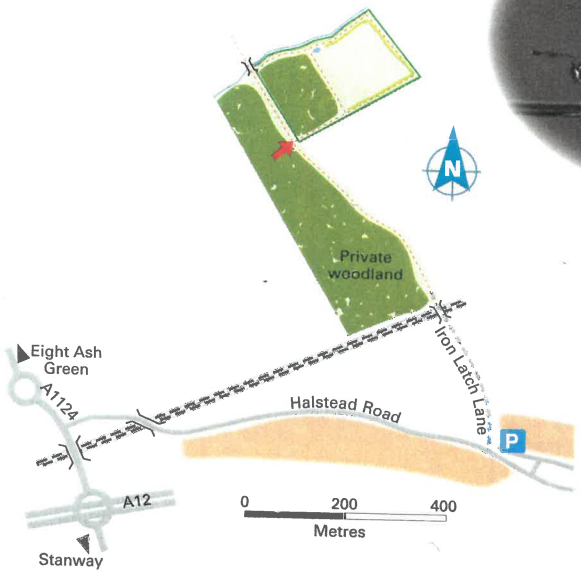
Accessible at all times.

May for grassland flowers, and late summer for butterflies.

Please keep dogs on a lead near livestock.



Common blues mating



Birdsfoot trefoil

John Weston

9ac/4ha OS Ex184 TM 266 245 SSSI

This reserve lies within the Naze public open space. It consists of blackthorn and bramble thickets, rough grassland and four ponds or 'scrapes'. It is named after the late John Weston, a leading Essex naturalist who was warden of the reserve until his death in 1984.

Its nesting birds include common and lesser whitethroat, joined recently by cetti's warbler. Water rail are seen and heard regularly. It is an important landfall for migrants, including many rarities, and also attracts a variety of winter visitors.

Notable among its flowering plants and grasses are parsley water-dropwort, slender thistle, pepper saxifrage and bush grass.

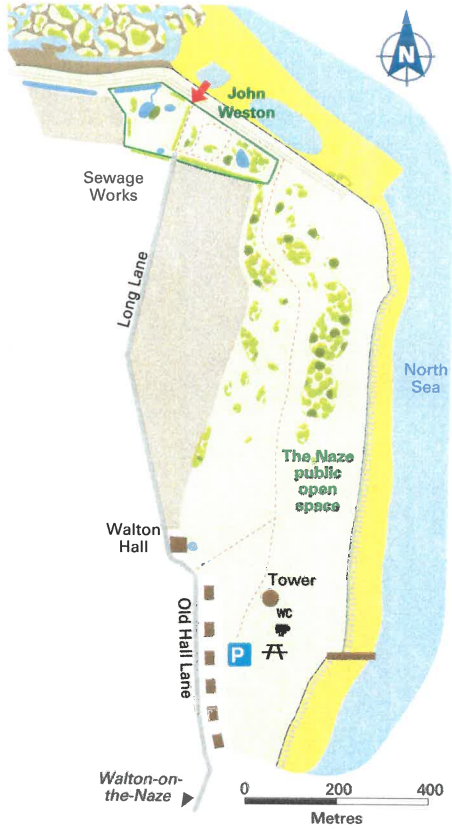
A circular path runs around the eastern section and is good for butterflies and other insects in summer.

Accessed from the seawall via footpaths running from the car park on The Naze public open space, north of Walton-on-the-Naze.

Trains run from Colchester to Walton.

Acts mainly as a sanctuary although organised and casual visits are possible. For more information call Essex Wildlife Trust on 01621 862960.

Please keep dogs under close control.



The Naze

The Naze is from the Old English *naes*, meaning a nose. It is a headland roughly three miles long and one mile wide, stretching northwards from the town of Walton-on-the-Naze. Behind it is Hamford Water, which it shelters from the North Sea. At its southern end is a hill that is being eroded, with the result that 20-metre high cliffs rise directly from the beach – unique on the Essex coast.

The cliffs at the Naze form one of the finest geological sites in Britain and for that reason are a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This is because of a spectacular exposure of a sandy deposit called Red Crag, lying on top of London Clay. The Red Crag was formed about 3 million years ago when the sea covered most of Essex, depositing a thick layer of shells as it advanced. Consequently the Red Crag contains large numbers of fossils.

Rainwater seeping down through the Red Crag runs out where it meets the impervious London Clay, with the result that masses are continually slumping down the cliffs to be washed away by the sea. Hence the Naze is also a striking example of coastal erosion. Two concrete pillboxes lying out on the beach some distance from the cliffs show how quickly erosion is occuring: they were built on the clifftop during the second world war.

Langdon Lake & Meadows

40ac/16ha OS Ex175 TQ 661 878

A recent extension to Langdon nature reserve, this is former plotlands and agricultural land on the west side of the Langdon Hills ridge.

It has a large lake, meadows and broadleaved woodland. The meadows are unimproved and have a variety of flowers and butterflies, but are particularly important as a habitat of the grizzled skipper butterfly. The bottom meadow is grazed and cut for hay, and the top meadow is managed to maintain a mosaic of scrub compartments and rides of varying widths and grass heights, to suit the grizzled skipper.

It also attracts a variety of birds, including raptors such as hobby, kestrel and sparrowhawk, and little grebe, wigeon, and common tern on the lake.

Four different species of bat have been recorded, feeding over the lake.

Grizzled skipper

Langdon

520ac/211ha OS Ex175 TQ 659 874

Visitor Centre

Between the A127 and the A13 4.5 miles east of M25 junction 29. Signposted from the north from the B148 turning off the A127 and from the south from the A13 – follow the brown-and-white duck signs.

Laindon station on the Fenchurch Street–Southend line is less than 800m from the reserve. Frequent bus services run from Basildon town centre to Laindon station, to Langdon Hills and to Highview Avenue.

Reserve accessible at all times. Visitor centre open 9am - 5pm except Mondays, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

Disabled access to the centre and a disabled persons' toilet.

Something of interest all the year round: spring for breeding birds and early flowers such as primroses; summer for orchids and other flowers, and for birdsong, autumn for fruit and berries and for late butterflies; winter to see huge flocks of migrant thrushes and perhaps a long-eared owl.

Call the Centre on 01268 419103 for more information and for details of events and activities for young and old.

Dogs welcome but must be kept under control at all times and are not permitted in the wildlife garden.

This is Essex Wildlife Trust's largest inland reserve, more than 500 acres of flower-rich meadows, ponds, ancient and secondary woodland, and hundreds of former plotland gardens.

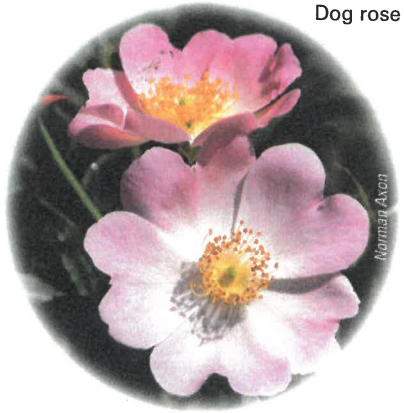
Its importance lies not in its rarities but in the abundance of wildlife once common in our countryside but now threatened by intensive farming and urban spread. To date 29 species of butterfly and over 350 flowering plants have been recorded, and the list still grows. Badgers, foxes and weasels thrive in 'unimproved' meadows and orchids can be counted in their thousands.

The visitor centre on Lower Dunton Road is the gateway to people's understanding of the social and natural history of this fascinating reserve, enabling thousands of visitors each year to explore what lies on their doorstep. Directly behind it is a superb wildlife garden.

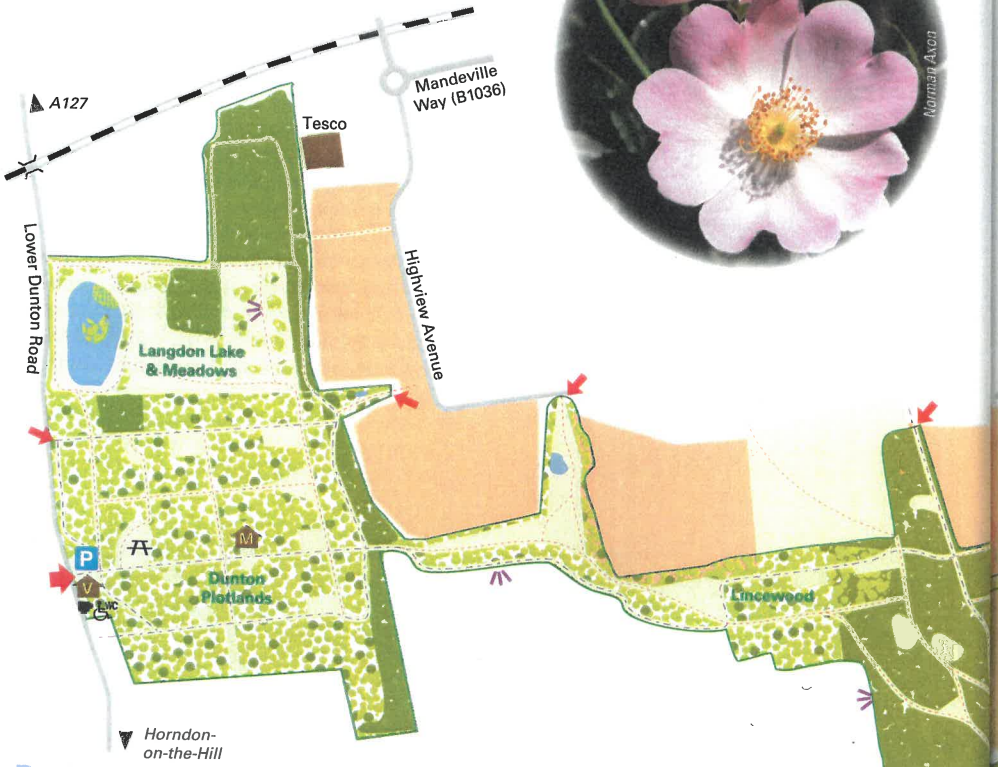
The original reserve consisted of four sections: from west to east these are Dunton, Lincewood, Marks Hill and Willow Park. For more detail and map see over page.

Ringlet

Langdon (continued)



Dog rose



Dunton

Dunton today consists of the remains of plotland homes and gardens, wide grassy avenues bordered by hawthorn scrub, and glades where wild grassland species compete with garden perennials. This patchwork of habitats is superb for butterflies. Old orchards with pear, apple, plum and damson trees attract people and animals alike in autumn and the plotland ruins offer many basking sites for snakes and lizards. The visitor centre and the adjacent picnic area make Dunton an ideal starting point for your visit to the reserve.

Lincewood

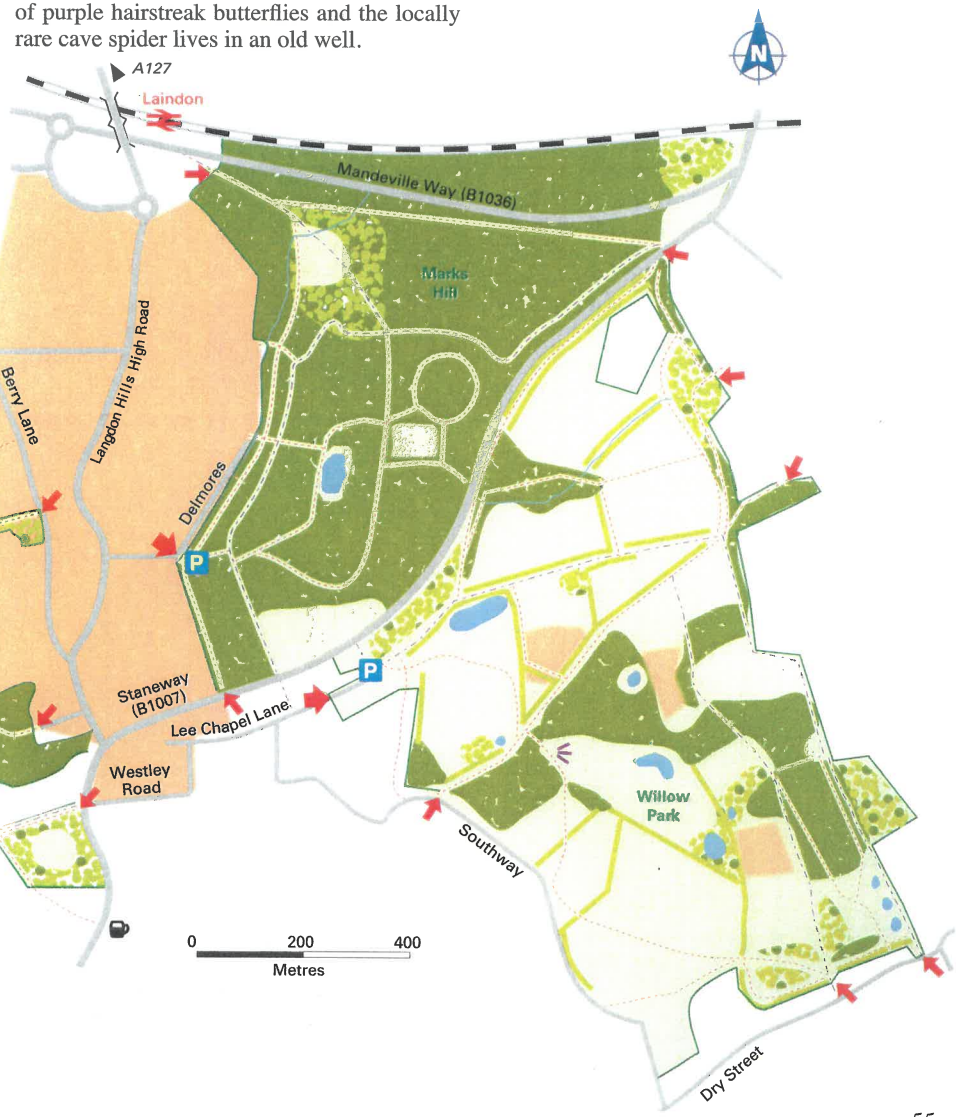
The derelict plotland roads in Lincewood are accompanied by ancient and secondary woodland on higher ground, making it a good spot to look out for all three woodpecker species. Bluebells carpet the woodland floor in spring and a riot of garden escapes flower throughout the summer – goats rue, old roses and many others. An adjacent recreation ground has thousands of green-winged orchids in May.

Marks Hill

Marks Hill is a patchwork of ancient and secondary woodland, meadows and deserted plotlands. Stands of oak, ash and hornbeam have been brought back into a coppice cycle to enhance the rich diversity of flowering plants. In spring there is an impressive display of bluebells, wood anemones and primrose. The grassland supports a large number of common spotted orchids. Several warbler species breed and in some years the nightingale. The boundary oaks are home to a colony of purple hairstreak butterflies and the locally rare cave spider lives in an old well.

Willow Park

Willow Park was once a mediæval deer park. The unimproved hay meadows are bordered by ancient hedgerows and more recent mixed plantations, planted by the Commission for New Towns in the 1980s. The meadows and rough grassland are home to many flowering plants, including several species of orchid, and to the grizzled skipper butterfly. Seven ponds of varying sizes attract a wide range of dragonflies and damselflies.



Lexden Gathering Grounds

22ac/9ha OS Ex184 TL 966 253

This was formerly a 'gathering ground' for water from constantly flowing springs and used as a water source from the turn of the century until the mid-1970s. It is owned by Anglian Water, who operate the covered reservoir and treatment works nearby, and managed by Essex Wildlife Trust.

In the 1960s parts of the site were planted with scots pine and with beech and oak. Between the woodlands lies a valley with semi-natural woodland of birch and ash on the steep slopes and a partially wooded marsh at the bottom, with a meadow beyond it.

The valley has bluebell and climbing corydalis, an uncommon plant typical of old woodland on sandy soils. The marsh has moschatel and old hazel and alder coppice. The meadow grassland is acidic with sheep's sorrel dominant over large areas.

Great spotted woodpeckers, sparrowhawks and many other woodland birds are present. Fox and badger forage on the site. In the meadow in summer you will see the commoner brown butterflies and small copper, whose caterpillars feed on sheep's sorrel.

The plantation has been thinned to improve the mix of trees and the ground flora. Rides have been widened and are kept open to help butterflies and other invertebrates. Water levels have been raised in the marsh and a pond has been dug, fed by the original springs. Shading is kept down by clearing surrounding trees and scrub.

In Lexden, west of Colchester centre. The entrance is on Cooks Lane off Cymbeline Way (A133), about 50m from its junction with the A12 at Lexden Road.

Bus services run along Lexden Road to the south.

Accessible at all times.

Linford Wood

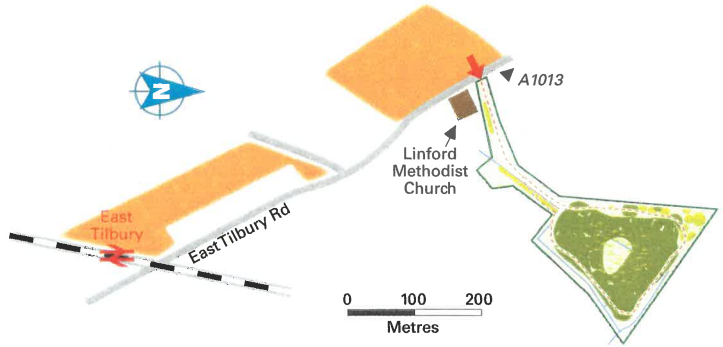
21ac/9ha OS Ex163 TQ 676 797 LNR

This wet woodland close to Linford consists of an ancient hedge, a mixed willow plantation, ditches and an open area. It is surrounded by arable farmland. It supports tawny owls, great spotted and green woodpeckers and is an oasis for migrant birds in spring and autumn.

Entrance from East Tilbury Road, Linford, just north of Linford Methodist Church.

A few minutes' walk from East Tilbury station.

Accessible at all times.



Green woodpecker

Great spotted woodpecker (female)

Lion Creek & Lower Raypits

161ac/65ha OS Ex176 TQ 923 948 SSSI

This former creek on the southern shore of the Crouch estuary was acquired by Essex Wildlife Trust in 1986. It was cut off from the estuary by a new seawall, and is bounded on three sides by the old one. The creek contains brackish water and in late summer has an attractive border of saltmarsh plants such as sea lavender, golden samphire and sea spurrey.

Above the zone affected by salt water, sea couch and false oat are the dominant grasses, with a mixture of tall herbs. Where the grass is shorter, smaller plants can be found, including the localised slender birds-foot trefoil and, on the seawall, sea clover.

Among its insects are essex skipper and brown argus butterflies, and roesel's and short-winged conehead bush-crickets.

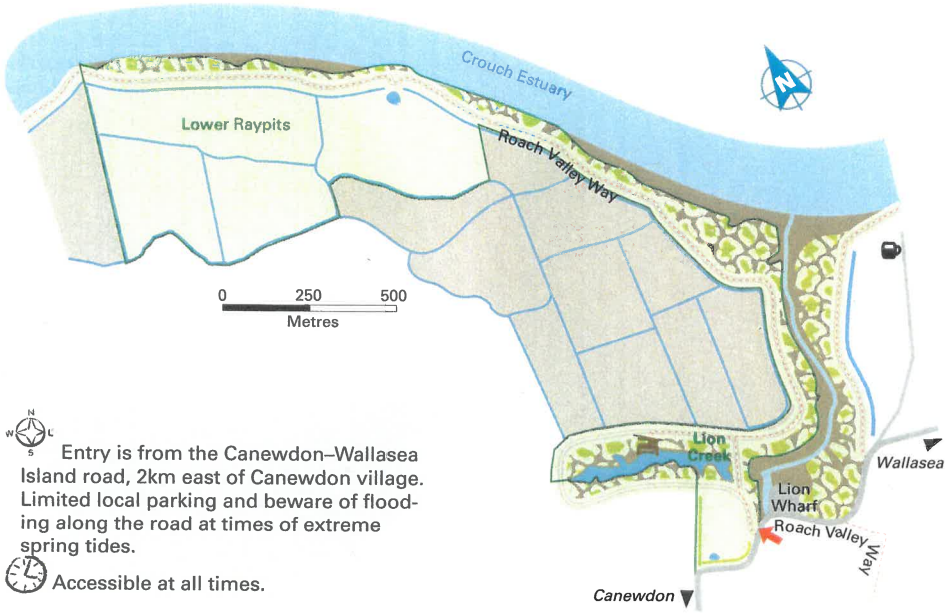
The water margins attract a variety of wading birds, and in winter birds of prey such as hen harrier and short-eared owl hunt over the grassland and seawalls.

The meadow alongside the creek was added to the reserve later, and supports a range of plants and insects including the shrill carder bee *Bombus sylvarum*, a national priority species.

Lower Raypits can be reached via the seawall path. It consists of saltmarsh, permanent pasture and seawalls. Most of it lies within the Crouch and Roach Estuaries SSSI, an important complex of saltmarsh, intertidal and grazing habitats that serves as a notable feeding and roosting area for wildfowl and waders, including brent geese.

The seawall was damaged in 2007 and a section has been rebuilt, and at the same time a scrape, featuring special water vole islands, and a small saline lagoon were created.

Dykes and seawalls support nationally scarce plants, including beaked tasselweed, sea barley, curved hard-grass and grass vetchling, plus a wealth of invertebrates, including scarce emerald damselfly.



Entry is from the Canewdon–Wallasea Island road, 2km east of Canewdon village. Limited local parking and beware of flooding along the road at times of extreme spring tides.

Accessible at all times.

Little Haven

104ac/42ha OS Ex175 TQ 811 889

This nature reserve surrounding Little Haven Children's Hospice was formerly part of Lower Wyburns Farm. It comprises 14 meadows, a network of fine old hedgerows and two woods.

Starvelarks Wood is mainly sweet chestnut and is probably a 19th century plantation that has been under coppice management.

Wyburns Wood contains a complex range of tree and plant species, indicating its ancient origins. It is very damp in places and here it supports a rare type of woodland known as plateau alder wood, which has a ground flora of male fern and pendulous sedge.

Turn south off the A127 at Rayleigh Weir on to Rayleigh Road (A129) and turn left on to Daws Heath Road at the Woodmans Arms mini-roundabout. Or join the A129 from the A13 and turn right on to Daws Heath Road. Park on local streets with consideration for residents.

Hourly bus service exc. Sundays serves Daws Heath Road. More frequent services run along Rayleigh Road and pass Woodmans Arms PH (800m to west via Daws Heath Road).

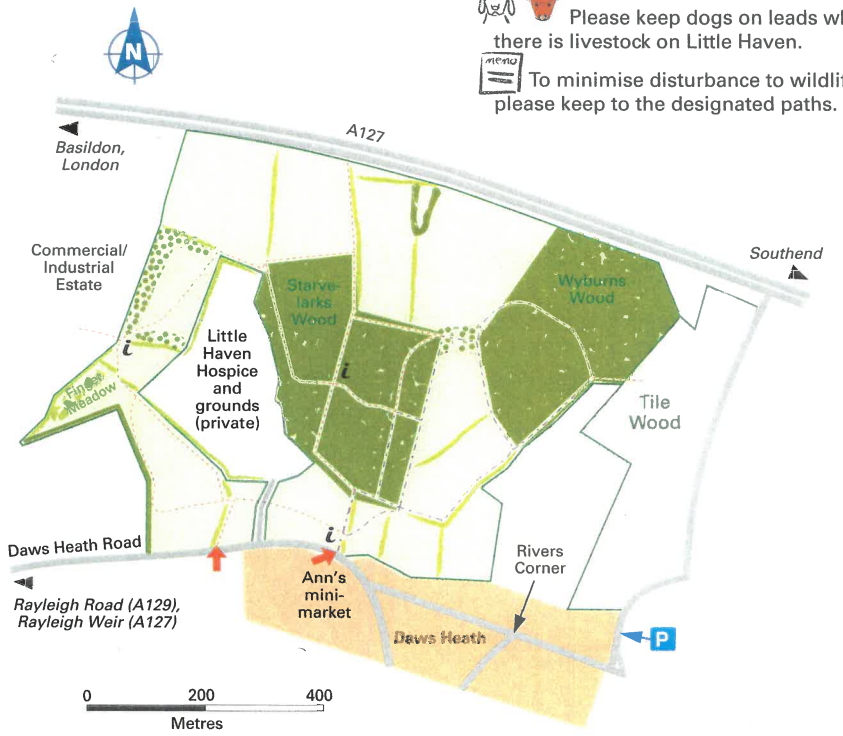
Accessible at all times.

April to June for spring flowers and woodland birdsong

Wheelchair access gate to Little Haven opposite Ann's mini-market.

Please keep dogs on leads when there is livestock on Little Haven.

To minimise disturbance to wildlife, please keep to the designated paths.



Little Waltham Meadows

22ac/9ha OS Ex183 TL 713 119

A chain of old flood and dry meadows on the east bank of the River Chelmer south of Little Waltham, including a patch of alder carr woodland. It was acquired by Essex Wildlife Trust in 1996 with the help of a local appeal and a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

A range of grassland plants can be found in the meadows, including meadow saxifrage, bee orchid and yellow oat-grass. The interconnecting network of old hedgerows contain many ancient pollard or coppice stools of elm, common and midland hawthorn, hazel, willow, alder and oak.

Tawny owl, sparrowhawk and kestrel all use the hedgerows and wood or hunt over the meadows. Kestrels regularly nest both here and in Newland Grove downstream.

The meandering River Chelmer has a good range of plants, including water lilies, brooklime and flag iris, and supports water voles.

400m west of the A130 Essex Regiment Way, just south of Little Waltham. There is a small car park in Back Lane at the end of the bridleway. The reserve can also by reached from Broomfield from the other end of that bridleway to Croxton's Mill.

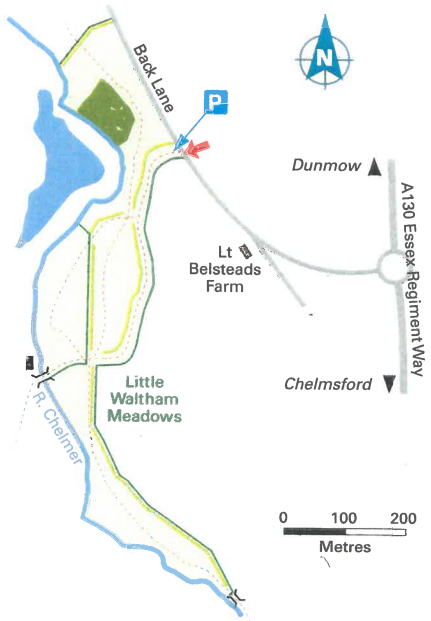
Bus services from Chelmsford run to Little Waltham via Broomfield to the west and via Essex Regiment Way to the east.

Accessible at all times.

Please keep dogs on a lead when there is livestock on the reserve.

Emperor dragonfly, common darter, ruddy darter and black-tailed skimmer occur in the summer. Kingfishers and, on warm summer evenings, bats hunt for food along the river.

The alder spinney provides a fine show of marsh marigolds in spring, followed by yellow iris, fool's watercress and flote grass in summer.



Ruddy darters mating

Loshes Reserve

17ac/7ha OS Ex196 TL 873 369

A nature reserve on the side of an attractive valley in low hills rising from the River Stour flood plain. It was farmed until the mid-1950s then left to 'go wild' until leased by Essex Wildlife Trust in 1974.

Its main part, east of the road and south of Loshes Brook, is high woodland with a glade, thick hedgerows and a marsh. The higher ground is on a considerable depth of coarse sand; the lower on chalky boulder clay, with a high water table giving rise to spring flushes.

It has a variety of flowering plants including ramsons (wild garlic), opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, yellow archangel, nettle-leaved bell-flower and common spotted orchid.

The Hop Ground over the road has mature oaks at the top but is mostly swamp covered by hazel, alder and willow thickets. It has guelder rose, lady's smock and hemp agrimony.

Birdlife is plentiful with nightingale and grasshopper warbler among the nesting species and little egrets visiting in winter. Insects include ringlet and white-letter hairstreak butterflies. Slow worms are resident.

Nettle-leaved bellflower

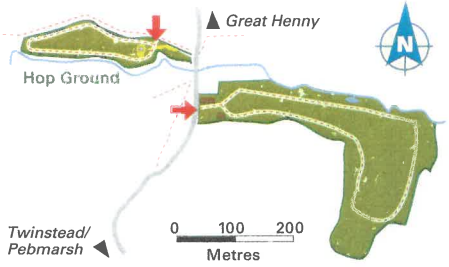
Three miles from Sudbury and six from Halstead. Take the Sudbury road from Halstead and, shortly after the Fox inn, take a turning signposted to Henny. After a mile this road descends a steep hill to a T-junction. Turn left and continue along a winding lane to a signpost to Alphamstone and Twinstead and turn right. The reserve is on the left at the bottom of the hill, where there is a large barn with the Trust sign outside.

Accessible at all times.

Spring and early summer.

Unsuitable for dog walking.

Children must be supervised when near stream and ponds, which have steep banks.



Maldon Wick

15ac/6ha OS Ex183/176 TL 842 057

Maldon Wick consists of one-and-a-half miles of the former Maldon–Woodham Ferrers railway line, most of it on embankment. The northern 250m of the embankment has been isolated by the Maldon southern link road. A meadow with a large pond was added to it later.

The reserve has earned a reputation for its butterflies, 28 different species having been recorded since it was established. They include purple, green and white-letter hairstreak, and large numbers of speckled wood and ringlet. Also, 17 species of dragonfly have been recorded in the meadow.

The central trackway is kept open and the Trust has created small clearings on the slopes, felled some trees and coppiced others. As a result flowering plants have increased dramatically. These include primrose, moschatel, sweet violet, field scabious and wild strawberry. It also has spindle and wild service trees.

It has many breeding birds, sometimes including nightingales.

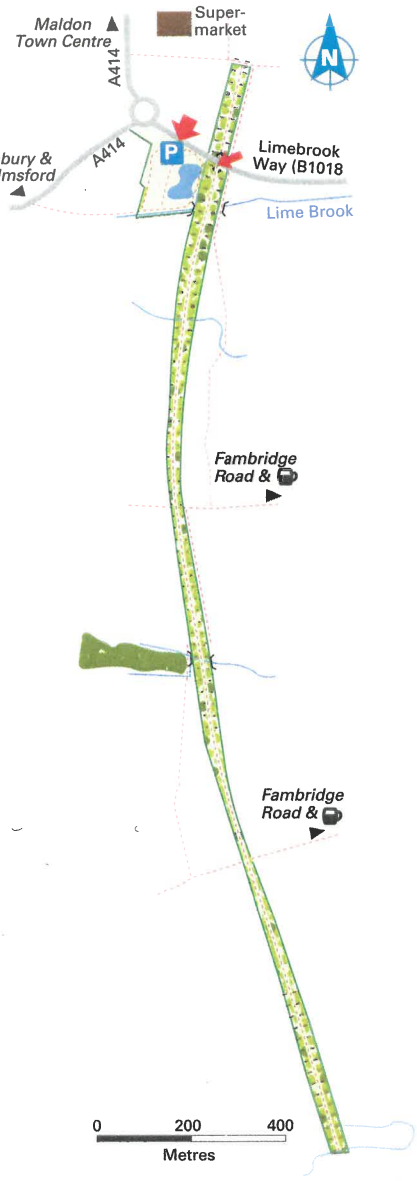
On Limebrook Way (B1018) near the roundabout where it joins the A414 (Chelmsford–Maldon).

Close to the Maldon–Chelmsford bus route along the A414.

Accessible at all times.

May–July for flowers and butterflies.

Speckled wood



Newland Grove

8ac/3ha OS Ex183 TL 716 108

Rough grassland alongside the River Chelmer, with thorn thickets and a small wood.

Such a mixture of habitats makes for a variety of plants – over 230 species have been recorded. Cowslips, snakeshead fritillaries and hairy violet are among the spring flowers, and in midsummer the area sloping down to the river in particular is a riot of colour, with common St John's wort, knapweed, musk mallow and many other species. Twayblade, wood spurge and pale wood violet can be found in the wood.

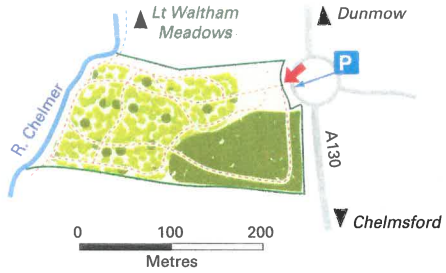
The reserve is also rich in butterflies – 23 species have been recorded.

Among the birds, good numbers of warblers of several species nest in the thickets and wood, while mallard, kingfisher and sedge warbler are often seen by the river.

Adjoins the A130 north of Chelmsford about 1,200m from the North Springfield housing estate. Entry is from the west side of a roundabout on the A130 east of Broomfield, opposite the turning to the Channels Golf Club and Windsurfing Centre. Parking for 2–3 cars at the entrance.

Accessible at all times

Midsummer for wild flowers and butterflies.



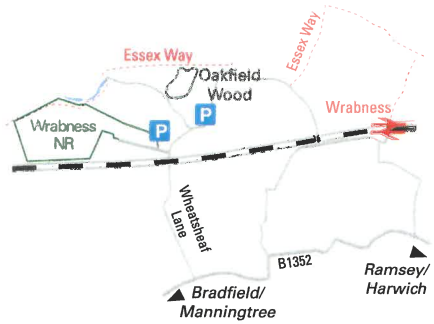
Twayblade

Snakeshead fritillary

Oakfield Wood

7ac/3ha OS Ex184 TM 167 315

Oakfield Wood is a 'green burial ground' overlooking the Stour Estuary at Wrabness, a natural alternative to traditional graveyard or crematorium burials. It was one of the first in the UK and has been visited by church and other organisers who have since set up sites throughout the country.



For each burial a native broadleaved tree is planted with a wooden plaque at its base, thus each burial contributes towards creating a new woodland on what used to be arable farmland. When the burial ground is full it will be managed as a nature reserve by Essex Wildlife Trust.

For more information about burials contact Peter Kincaid on 01255 503456.

Reached via Wheatsheaf Lane, which turns off the B1352 between Bradfield and Wrabness. The car park is on the left beyond the railway bridge. From there a path leads to the burial ground.

1.5km walk from Wrabness rail station. Colchester–Harwich buses run along the B1352.

Accessible at all times.

Onslow Green

2.5ac/1ha OS Ex183 TL 654 183

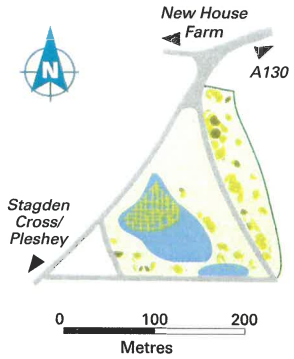
An attractive village green with a wide marginal hedge and two ponds. It has some interesting late spring/early summer flowers, including dyer's greenweed, tormentil and a small quantity of sulphur clover.

On its margins the larger pond has yellow flag, water forget-me-not and fine-leaved water-dropwort. It attracts dragonflies and great diving beetles, and in season you may see smooth newts and the occasional great crested newt.

About one mile south of Barnston village. Approach along the A130 Chelmsford to Great Dunmow road and take the turning to Onslow Green. You will see the green on the left past a sharp left-hand bend.

Hourly or better bus services to Barnston from Bishop's Stortford, Stansted Airport and Chelmsford.

Accessible at all times.



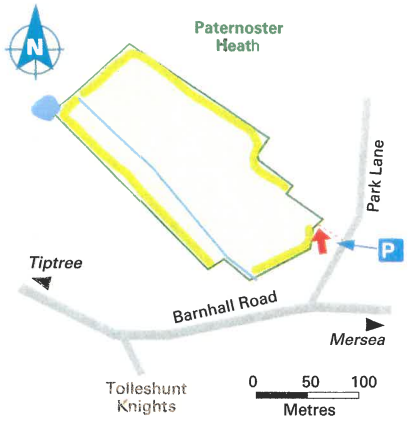
Oxley Meadow

8ac/3ha OS Ex184 TL 918 149

Despite its name, this reserve consists of *two* flower-rich meadows, the larger one almost completely surrounded by wide luxuriant hedgerows with a number of mature oaks and other trees.

A large colony of green-winged orchids is scattered across the meadows, and adderstongue fern is perhaps more numerous here than anywhere else in Essex.

The meadows support the commoner grassland butterflies, and the hedgerows provide nesting sites for a variety of birds, notably the lesser whitethroat.



From the A12 take the B1023 towards Tiptree, continuing through Tiptree village and down Factory Hill to a Y-junction, where you take the left fork (Brook Road, becoming Barnhall Road) towards Mersea. Turn down Park Lane (first turning on left after telephone box) and reserve entrance is second opening on left. Limited parking on the grassed area at the front of the reserve when conditions allow.

Regular Colchester to Maldon buses to Tiptree: the reserve is about 1 mile walk along footpaths.

Accessible at all times.

From late March up to the hay cut in mid-July; the orchids are usually in flower in April/May.

Please keep dogs on leads when there is livestock on the reserve.

Dyer's greenweed

Adderstongue fern

Phyllis Currie

22ac/9ha OS Ex183 TL 723 182

This nature reserve, sloping down to a tributary of the River Ter, was left to Essex Wildlife Trust by Mrs Phyllis Currie. It is an attractive and varied landscape in its own right but what adds interest is to see how the Trust's management is increasing its wildlife value.

The most attractive single feature is a lake, created in the stream valley in the 1960s. The lake, streams and ditches are valuable breeding sites for dragon-flies and damselflies – 13 species have been recorded. The grassland and sheltered glades and rides provide breeding sites for butterflies – 23 species recorded. Tufted duck nest and kingfisher and grey heron are regular visitors.

A reedbed has been created, a shallow pool excavated and dams installed to raise the water level in the main stream. The Scots pine plantation is being thinned to favour broad-leaved trees. A plantation of hybrid poplar and sycamore is being felled in blocks and replanted with native tree species.

To help to increase wild flowers, the meadows are cut for hay and then grazed by sheep.

On Dumney Lane, Great Leighs. Take the road to Felsted at the St Anne's Castle PH in Great Leighs. Dumney Lane is the first right turning.

Regular buses run to St Anne's Castle PH from Braintree and Chelmsford.

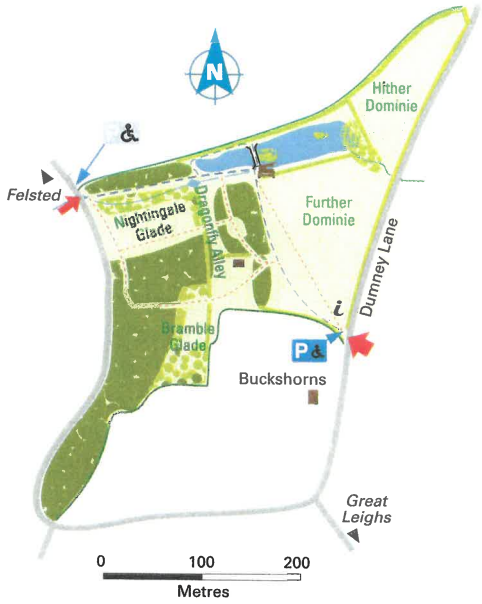
Accessible at all times.

Interesting all the year round. A succession of flowers from blackthorn in February through to the last of the waterside plants in autumn is followed by the lovely colours of leaves and fruits at the end of the year, with the extra attraction of butterflies and dragonflies in summer.

Wheelchair path leading from both entrances and around the lake.

Please keep dogs on leads at all times.

Grey heron



Pound Wood

55ac/22ha OS Ex175 TQ 816 888

Pound Wood was acquired by Essex Wildlife Trust in 1993 following a public appeal. Its complex geology gives it a great variation in woodland types. Sweet chestnut and birch occur on the plateaux and ridges, hornbeam and holly on the slopes, and hornbeam, ash, willow, aspen and hazel in the three stream valleys. In places there are many wild service trees. The oaks are mostly sessile, with pedunculate in the valleys. The south-west section is very old secondary woodland, almost indistinguishable from the ancient woodland.

There are fine early mediæval woodbanks, several ponds and many dells. Bramble, bracken and bluebell dominate the woodland floor, with common cow-wheat, yellow archangel, wood spurge and figwort where light can penetrate this once neglected wood.

Heath fritillaries can be seen in the more open woodland beneath the power cables.

Turn south off the A127 at Rayleigh Weir on to Rayleigh Road (A129) and turn left on to Daws Heath Road at the Woodmans Arms mini-roundabout. Or join the A129 from the A13 and turn right on to Daws Heath Road. Continue along Bramble Rd and park on St Michael's Rd.

Hourly bus service exc. Sundays serves Daws Heath Road. More frequent services run along Rayleigh Road and pass Woodmans Arms PH (1 mile to west via Daws Heath Road).

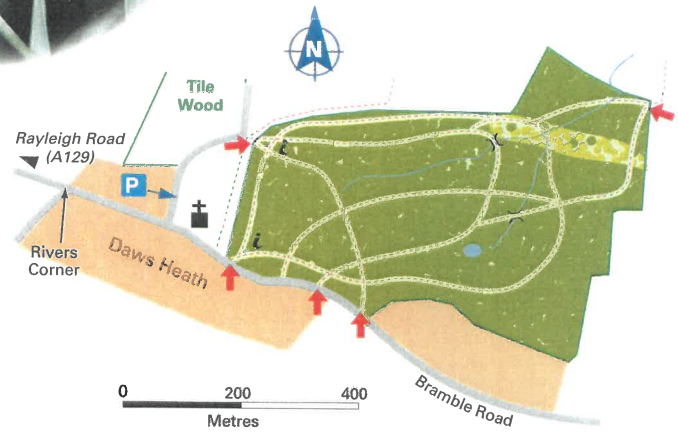
Accessible at all times.

April to June for spring flowers and woodland birdsong.

To minimise disturbance to wildlife, please keep to the designated paths.

from dispensers in the reserves or from Essex Wildlife Trust visitor centres.

Heath fritillary



Ray Island

100ac/40ha OS Ex184 TM 011 154 SSSI, SPA

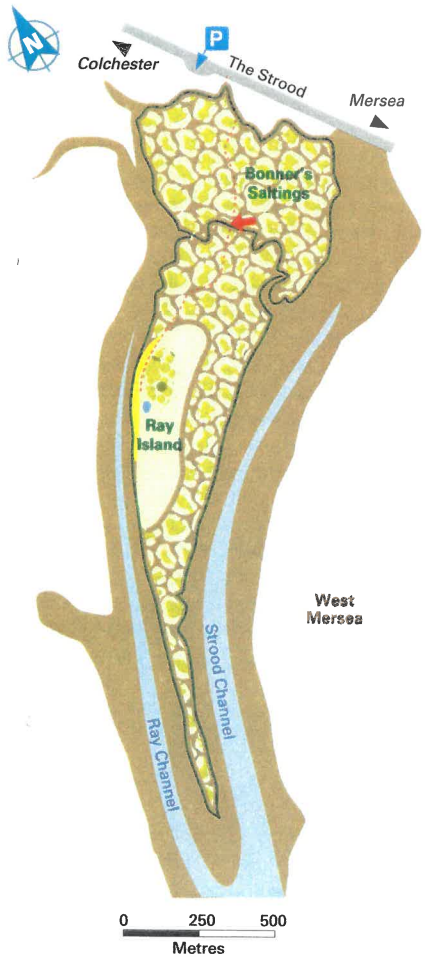
This large sandy mound rising out of the surrounding saltings is owned by the National Trust and managed by Essex Wildlife Trust. It has a shingly foreshore/beach area on its northern side, with a sizeable freshwater pond nearby, and extensive areas of rough grassland. On higher ground, there are blackthorn thickets and some spectacular old hawthorns.

The southern edge of the island has some of the finest natural transition areas of saltmarsh–grassland–scrub to be found on the Essex coast. The wide range of saltmarsh plants includes lax-flowered sea lavender, golden samphire and sea rush.

Breeding birds include redshank (in some numbers), oystercatcher and shelduck. Large numbers of wildfowl and waders overwinter – flocks of more than 2,000 brent geese are not unusual. All the common finches can be seen throughout the year, but numbers increase dramatically in winter when large flocks feed on the seed heads of sea aster and other saltmarsh plants. Birds of prey are commonly seen, including long-eared and short-eared owl, hen harrier, merlin and barn owl.

Large numbers of the commoner butterflies can be seen in normal summers and there are lots of small mammals, particularly voles.

David Nichols



Bonner's Saltings

This saltmarsh between the Strood causeway and Ray Island is private property, but the owners have kindly agreed to Trust members having access to study the natural history and to cross to Ray Island. Plant enthusiasts will find a large patch of dittander by the Strood causeway.

To the west of the Strood – the causeway that carries the B1025 from Colchester across to Mersea Island. Footpath access for Trust members only across Bonner's Saltings. General public access using your own boat, leaving Mersea moorings at high tide and heading up Ray Channel.

Regular bus services (half-hourly on weekdays, hourly on Sundays) run between Colchester and West Mersea and will drop off and pick up at Strood Villa.

General public access to the reserve as part of the management agreement with the National Trust.

From late September through to May for birds; July for acres of flowering sea lavender.

Unsuitable for dog walking.

Check the state and times of the tide before crossing Bonner's Saltings as the pathway is often flooded to a depth of several feet – do not attempt to cross in the two hours preceding high water. The pathway is approximately one mile long and visitors have to negotiate a number of single-plank bridges without handrails. Care must be taken as these can be very slippery. Wellington boots and weatherproof clothing are essential.

Dittander

Tony Gutton

Roding Valley Meadows

158ac/63ha OS Ex174 TQ 430 943 LNR, SSSI (part)

This Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserve comprises the largest surviving area of traditionally managed river-valley habitat in Essex. It consists of flower-rich unimproved hay meadows, both wet and dry, bounded by thick hedgerows, together with a small amount of scrub, secondary woodland and tree plantation. It follows the River Roding for some 1.5 miles between Chigwell Lane and Roding Lane, Buckhurst Hill, as it meanders across this ancient landscape.

The meadows are rich in flowers, including pepper saxifrage, southern marsh orchid, ragged robin, marsh marigold and devilsbit scabious. The impressive green lane that runs from near the river to the M11 motorway by Grange Farm forms part of the old route from Epping Forest to Romford market, and has many woodland flowers.

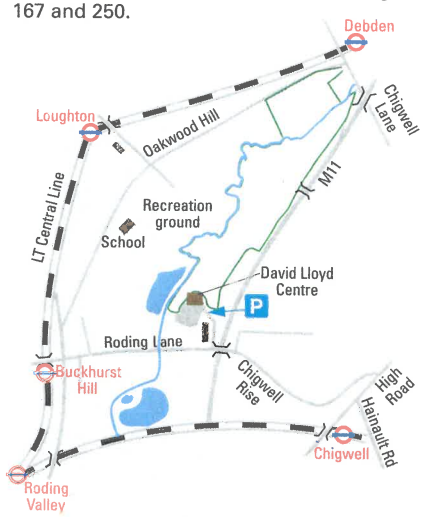
In spring and summer, sedge warbler, reed bunting and common whitethroat can be found about the river and meadows. Late summer sees flocks of finches and other seed-eating birds on the seed heads of thistle and teasel. Grey heron, little grebe and snipe are regular winter visitors.

Many insects inhabit the meadows and hedgerows, both unusual and common. Most summers produce drifts of meadow brown butterflies with their lazy, dipping flight.

The meadows were shaped by an ancient system of management, which included grazing and hay cutting. Current management mimics this regime, using traditional breeds of cattle and a summer hay cut. Hedgerows help define the uniqueness of the British countryside. There are almost ten miles of hedgerow on the reserve, much of it managed by laying and coppicing.

Accessible from the Roding Valley recreation ground via a number of entrances on the Loughton side of the river. The car park is next to the David Lloyd Tennis Centre off Roding Lane.

Buckhurst Hill, Loughton and Debden tube stations are all within a few minutes' walk of the reserve. Many bus services run to neighbouring tube stations, including 20, 167 and 250.



Accessible at all times.

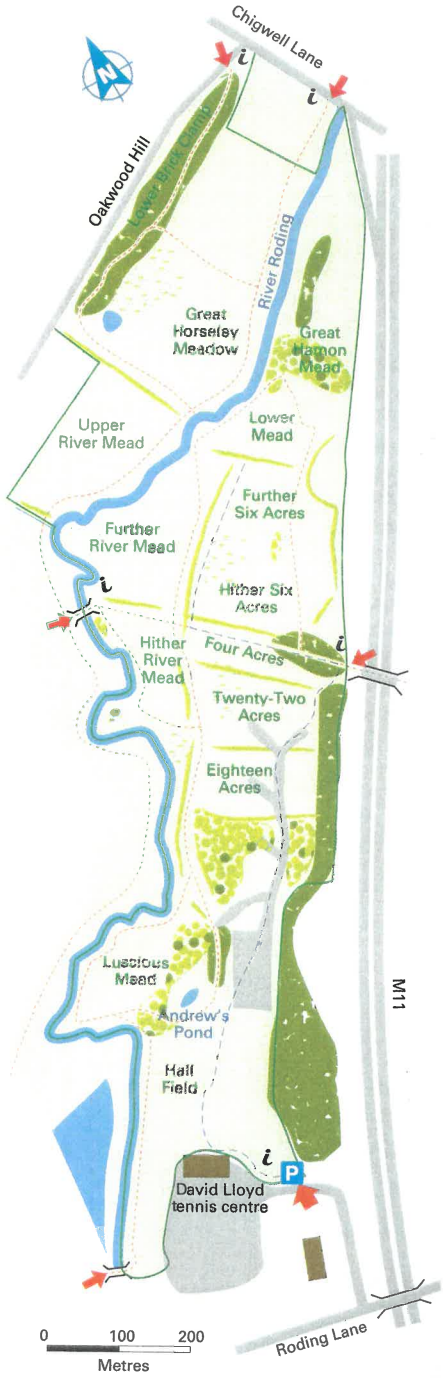
For meadow flowers, any time from late spring up to the mid-July hay cut.

One-mile linear surfaced track for wheelchairs; all kissing gates adapted to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters.

Please keep dogs on leads when there is livestock on the reserve.

from Essex Wildlife Trust visitor centres or Epping Forest DC (01992 564222). For help call the warden on 020 8508 1593.

Meadow brown



Roman River Valley

44ac/18ha OS Ex184 TL 975 211

Both parking and access are difficult for the entrance north of Kingsford Bridge. Instead, park in Layer-de-la-Haye on New Cut (or a side road), a turning off the B1026 about 700m south of Kingsford Bridge, and access the reserve via the public footpath from New Cut.

Bus services from Colchester to Layer and Maldon pass the entrance.

Accessible at all times.

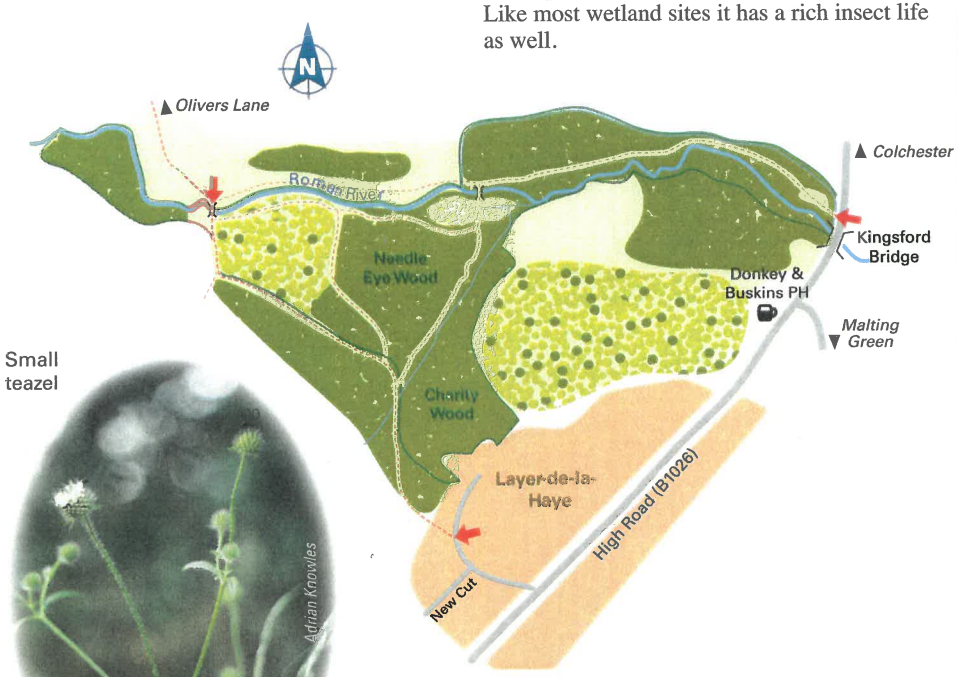
April–May for birdsong and early flowers; July for dragonflies and other insects.

A fragment of traditional river valley landscape: the Roman River is a narrow stream at this point, and meanders through marsh and woodland, mostly old.

The marsh is fed by springs filtering out of glacial gravels, and is full of aquatic plants including one that is unusual – the small teasel, which has globular white flowers in late summer.

The woodland is part of Needle Eye Wood, and has a variety of trees including standard oaks, coppiced hornbeam and several old yews. Its flowering plants include yellow archangel and moschatel.

Birdlife includes most of the common woodland species and occasionally nightingales. Like most wetland sites it has a rich insect life as well.



Small teazel

Rushy Mead

11.5ac/5ha OS Ex194 TL 497 197

The name Rushy Mead comes from an old tithe map showing the site as riverside meadows. More recently it has been occupied by a pumping station for a sewage works, which ceased operations in the 1950s. The current nature reserve was created through an agreement between the owners, Thames Water plc, Wimpey Homes, who made a generous contribution towards running costs, and Essex Wildlife Trust, who manage it now.

The low ground has water near the surface all year, and there are good areas of sedge and reed. Their tall, dense growth provides cover for sedge and reed warbler in summer, and for snipe and water rail in winter.

The northern end of the site has developed into mature alder woodland with ash and willow, and is a particularly good area for birds. Yellow iris and wild angelica are just two of the many plants that flower here in summer.

A network of drainage ditches supports a rich variety of aquatic wildlife including marsh marigold, dragonflies and water beetles.

The drier ground has areas of scrubby woodland and chalky grassland. The latter supports a good variety of wild flowers including bee orchid and wild carrot.

The main aim of management work is to maintain open water in ditches and scrape, and to control the spread of scrub and of invasive plants such as Russian comfrey.

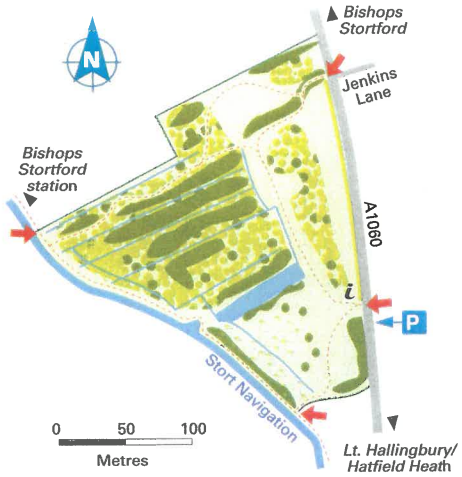
Yellow iris

One mile south of Bishop's Stortford, lying between the A1060 road to Hatfield Heath and the River Stort. It can be entered from the A1060 or from the towpath running alongside the Stort Navigation.

800m walk from Bishop's Stortford station (BR Liverpool St–Cambridge): head south along the towpath. Hourly bus service from Bishop's Stortford station passes the main entrance on the A1060.

Accessible at all times.

Spring and summer for flowers, birds and insect life.



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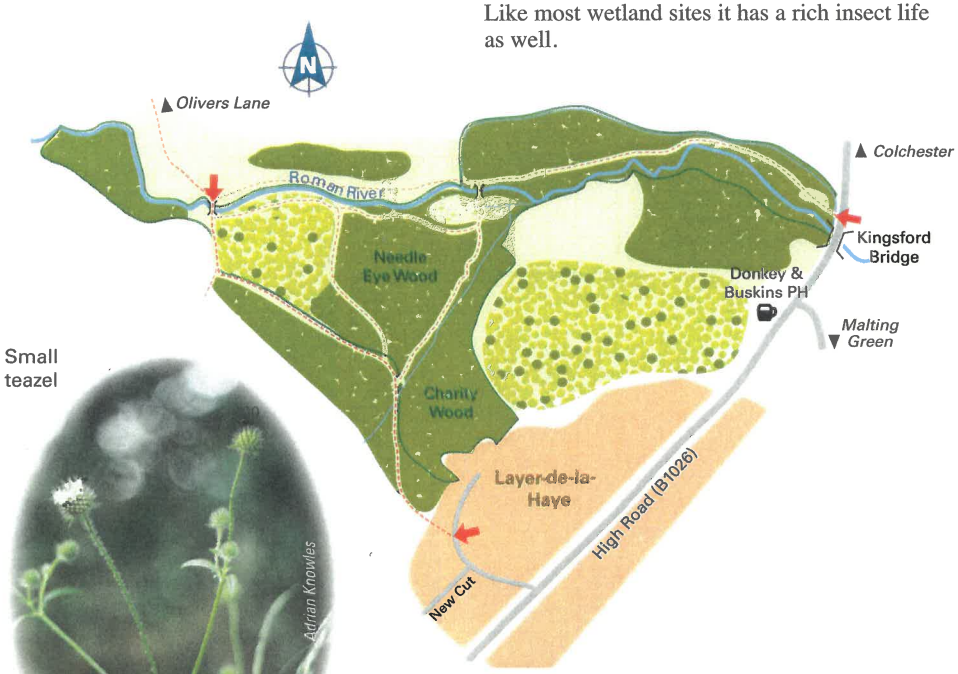

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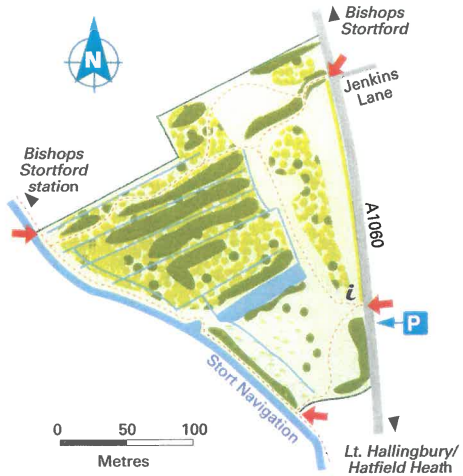
Accessible at all times.

Spring and summer for flowers, birds and insect life.



Saint Peter's Marsh

0.5ac/0.2ha OS Ex195 TL 757 237

One of the smallest nature reserves in Essex, comprising freshwater marsh fed by springs. It is a traditional frog breeding site and for this reason Essex Wildlife Trust acquired it from Essex County Council for a nominal sum. An adjoining strip of land was donated later by Messrs G. Tanner and P. O. Wicks.

To the north of St Peter's church, Bocking (close to Braintree Council offices). Entrance off St-Peter's-in-the-Fields (unadopted road).

Accessible at all times.

Dress for nettles and soft wet ground.

Sandylay and Moat Woods

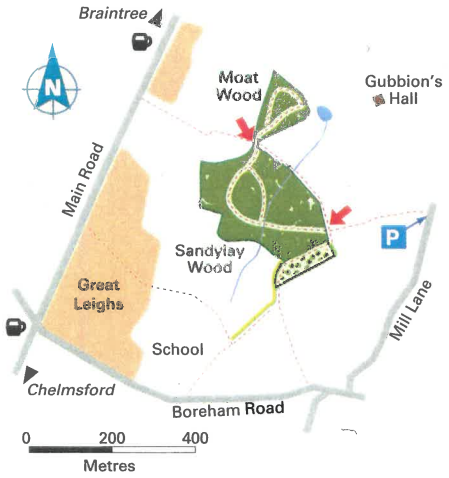
18.5ac/7ha OS Ex183 TL 735 174

These two attractive small woods next to one another were donated to Essex Wildlife Trust in 1982 by the late Mr Roland Adams and Mrs Adams. They contain a quantity of coppiced small-leaved lime, growing on boulder clay. One lime, in the middle of a ride in Sandylay Wood, is of great size and age. Sycamore and planted poplars are now being reduced in favour of other species, including small-leaved lime for coppicing; and conifer plantations are being reduced in favour of broadleaved trees.

Part of a field to the south of Sandylay Wood has been added to the reserve recently, and has been planted up with native trees.

The woods are rich in flowering plants. In spring, wood anemones are abundant by the small stream and primroses alongside the paths and rides. Other species include sweet violet, spurge laurel, early purple orchid, twayblade and stinking iris. Wood sedge is widespread, and the unusual thin-spiked wood sedge occurs also.

The reserve has many typical woodland birds, notably goldcrest around a plantation of Norway spruce, and a rich insect life.



In Great Leighs. Follow the public footpath for 400m from Mill Lane. Cars can be parked on the wide grass verge along the lane, but please do not obstruct the gateway providing access to the footpath.

Buses stop on the A131 near the Dog and Partridge PH, from where a public footpath runs east from the road to another entrance.

Accessible at all times.

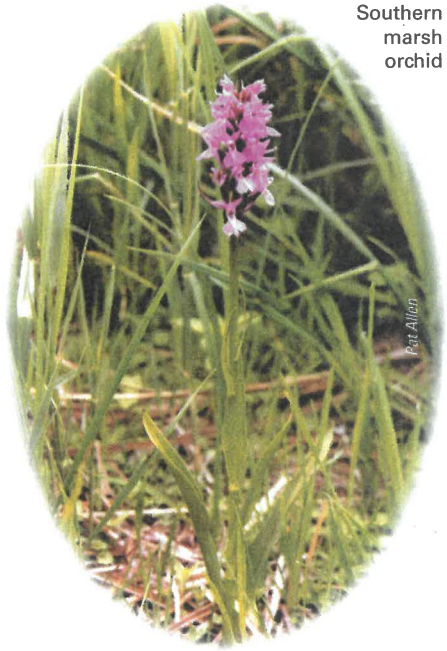
Late March to May for flowering plants and breeding birds.

Sawbridgeworth Marsh

22ac/9ha OS Ex194 TL 493 158 SSSI

This marshland nature reserve lies in the valley of the River Stort and consists of ten acres of waterlogged marsh, normally under an inch or two of water for most of the year; six acres of peaty meadow sloping up from the marsh to the eastern boundary; and a low-lying willow plantation to the south. Most of it is in Hertfordshire and a small part in Essex, so it was acquired jointly by the Essex and Hertfordshire & Middlesex Trusts when the site became available in 1970.

It contains plants which were once quite common but are now found on only a few sites in the county, such as marsh willowherb and marsh valerian. Other uncommon plants include marsh arrow-grass, southern marsh orchid and blunt-flowered rush.


Southern marsh orchid

Pat Allen

To the west of the unclassified road from Sawbridgeworth to Gaston Green and Little Hallingbury. There is no car park, but there are two small lay-bys on the opposite side of the road about 200m north of the reserve entrance. Care should be taken since the road is narrow and traffic travels at high speeds.

About 800m north-east of Sawbridgeworth station: turn left outside the station then left into Hallingbury Road.

Accessible at all times.

Worth a visit at all times of the year but the spring and summer months are usually the most interesting.

Not suitable for wheelchair access because of wet conditions, narrow paths and plank bridges.

Wellingtons usually necessary.

It has several open drainage ditches and two ponds rich in aquatic life. The areas of sedge, reeds and tall fen vegetation provide a valuable nesting habitat for reed and sedge warblers. Other breeding birds include snipe and water rail. In summer the reserve is alive with insects.

The management regime is designed to encourage diversity of species. Enclosures are grazed by horses and parts of the marsh are cut on an annual or biennial basis. To prevent it from smothering smaller plants, the dead material is raked off and either burnt on permanent fire sites or gathered into permanent stacks which provide a valuable habitat for grass snakes and invertebrates. Periodically the willows fringing the marsh are pollarded.

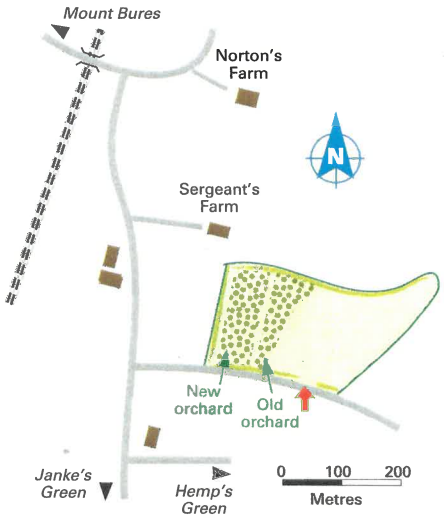
Snipe

Sergeant's Orchard

8ac/3ha OS Ex196 TL 907 308

These two former-arable fields and a 19th-century orchard were left to the Essex Wildlife Trust in 1996 by the then owner of Sergeant's Farm. Within the orchard area a wide range of old varieties of fruit tree remain, together with an old pond and the remnants of the hedges.

The orchard, the hedges and the ponds have been restored, and a new orchard has been planted on the western field using stock taken from the old varieties in the original orchard.



Between Aldham and Chappel turn off the A1124 into Vernons Road. Follow signs for Bures/Sudbury and turn right at the T-junction. There is a small pull-in at the entrance to the bridle path with a chain attached to two metal posts.

Accessible at all times.

Shadwell Wood

17.5ac/7ha OS Ex209 TL 573 412 SSSI

The dominant trees in this oxlip woodland are oak and ash, with coppiced hazel and maple growing beneath them. It also has midland hawthorns, rare trees such as lineage elm and bird cherry, and *Daphne mezereum*, popular for the garden but rare in the wild.

A host of flowering plants grow on the woodland floor. Early spring brings oxlips, wood violets and wood anemones. These give way to early purple orchids, bluebells, bugle and herb paris. Summer brings common spotted orchids, meadowsweet and sanicle.

The wood is managed in the traditional manner by coppicing. This encourages many summer-visiting birds to nest, including the occasional nightingale. Fencing is used to exclude deer from the wood. Otherwise they browse the tender coppice regrowth, killing or stunting the trees, and eat the flowers.

On the main road from Saffron Walden, about one mile before the village of Ashdon. Entrance on foot by a track at the side of 'Barleycroft' bungalow. Park by the track to Lt Hales Wood on the opposite side of the road. Please do not block the entrance to this track.

Accessible at all times.

Spring through to early summer for flowers and migrant birds.

Unsuitable for wheelchairs. Bench at top of Chivers Ride with good views of butterflies for those who can't walk far.

Please keep your dog on a lead.

Please keep deer gates shut.

Leaflet at Shadwell Wood entrance.

Early purple orchid

Shotgate Thickets

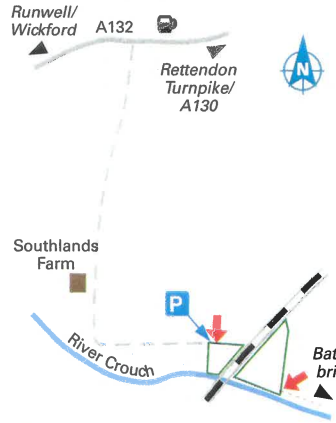
8ac/3ha OS Ex183 TQ 767 942

This Essex Wildlife Trust nature reserve is situated on the north bank of the tidal River Crouch, which is narrow at this point. It consists of thorn thickets, rough grassland and large ponds. With the adjoining river banks and railway embankment this small area has a surprising diversity of habitats and, consequently, of wildlife.

Well over 100 plant species can be found, including golden dock and dyer's greenweed. More than 70 species of bird have been recorded, about half of which breed on or near the reserve. This includes all three species of woodpecker, and a good selection of finches and warblers.

The ponds teem with life and eleven species of dragonfly have been identified, including the emerald damselfly and black-tailed skimmer. Butterflies are numerous. Among the other insects roesel's bush-cricket is found in good numbers.

800m north-east of Wickford. Access is either through Southlands farm (parking at far end of the farm road) or west along the river bank from Battlesbridge, starting close to the Hawk public house.

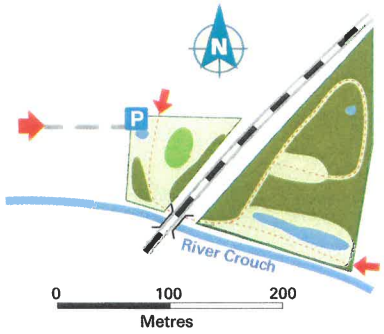


Occasional buses along the A132 or train to Battlesbridge.

Accessible at all times.

At its best in mid-to-late spring when scrub and wood resound with birdsong.

The large pond has steep banks and deep water.



Emerald damselflies mating

Shut Heath Wood

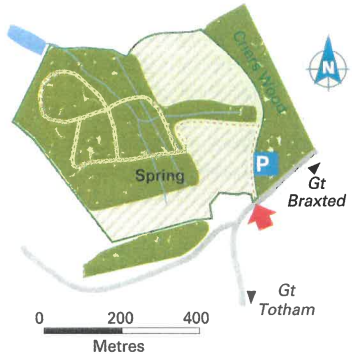
50ac/20ha OS Ex183 TL 853 133

This Essex Wildlife Trust reserve, just below the crest of the Great Totham Ridge, includes 23 acres of ancient woodland forming part of the Chantry Wood complex. The remaining 27 acres are arable land managed by a tenant farmer.

The wood comprises large oak standards with sections of sweet chestnut and hornbeam coppice, and ash, elder and hazel understorey. The eastern edge is wet, with an open glade and thick scrub areas, while the southern edge consists of secondary woodland of silver birch and hawthorn that has colonised the adjacent field edges. The Trust has resumed coppicing and created some open areas to rejuvenate the wood.

In spring, bugle, cuckoo flower, wood sorrel, bluebells, wood anemone, primrose and dog violet flower, followed in summer by yellow pimpernel, red bartsia, greater birdsfoot trefoil and wood sage.

Dragonflies and damselflies may be seen in the glade and, in July, glow-worms (which are actually beetles, not worms). Large amounts of standing dead wood in the site make it excellent for invertebrates, including many wood ants.



Leave the B1022 at Roundbush Corner, Great Totham, taking Mountains Road. After about 1200m take the first turning on the right (Tiptree Road), and the entrance is about 400m down on the left with double gates at the entrance. Take care when leaving as visibility is restricted.

Bus to Great Totham from Maldon or Colchester and get off at Great Totham post office. The reserve is 800m north.

Accessible at all times.

March and April for spring flowers.

Bugle

Glow-worm

Stanford Warren

41ac/17ha OS Ex163/175 TQ 687 812 SSSI

A Thames-side reserve consisting of one of the largest reedbeds in Essex, created by gravel extraction in the 1920s, together with areas of marsh and rough grassland.

In spring and summer the reedbeds are full of birds fussing around, including reed buntings, reed warblers and sedge warblers, all of which breed. Cuckoos regularly use the warblers as hosts for their eggs. Water rail breed here too, but you will be lucky to see them because they are very shy, creeping quietly around in the reeds.

Winter brings in bearded tits, grey wagtail and snipe – best seen along the Hassenbrooke, a small river that bisects the reserve and crosses under the footpath.

Common lizard, grass snake and adder frequent the rough grassland, and harvest mice nest among the reeds.

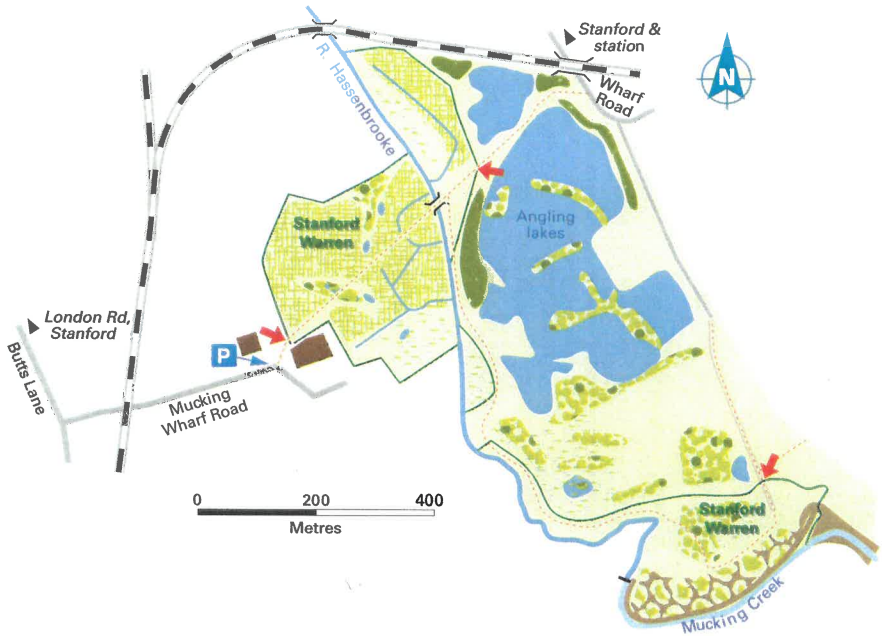
Access from London Road in Stanford-le-Hope – off the A1013, which runs alongside the A13. Turn south down Butts Lane then left into Mucking Wharf Road. Please park considerately by the former church at the start of the footpath.

About 20 minutes' walk from Stanford station. Turn right outside the station then right down Wharf Road. You meet the footpath after crossing under the railway.

Accessible at all times.

Late spring/summer for breeding birds and flowering plants; winter for visiting birds such as bearded tits.

Please keep to the marked footpaths, which provide good views over the whole area.



Stow Maries Halt

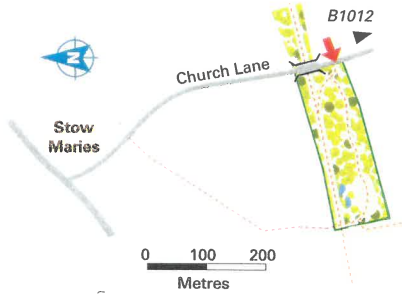
5.5ac/2ha OS Ex175 TQ 835 991

This nature reserve consists of the former Stow Maries Halt on the disused Maldon to South Woodham Ferrers railway line, along with an adjoining meadow acquired later.

The remains of the platform are still visible by the reserve entrance and four species of fern – wall-rue, maidenhair spleenwort, black spleenwort and hartstongue – grow in the mortar of the bridge here. This part of the reserve grades from cutting to shallow embankment and consists largely of hawthorn and blackthorn scrub with occasional privet and a scattering of young oak and ash.

Scrub has been cleared from the lower part and a pond has been excavated in marshy ground in the north-west corner. In late spring there are many common spotted orchids and a number of adderstongue ferns, followed in summer by common fleabane (in profusion), wild carrot and St John's worts.

The reserve has a good selection of butterflies, including purple and white-letter hairstreaks, and dragonflies. Glow-worms reliably put on a show in July every year, scattered throughout the reserve.



Reached via Church Lane, which connects the lower Burnham road between South Woodham Ferrers and North Fambridge with the road through Stow Maries village. Cars can be parked on the wide grass verge of the bridge over the dismantled railway.

Accessible at all times.

Late spring for orchids; summer for wild flowers and insects (glow-worms in July).

Please keep your dog on a lead when sheep are grazing the reserve.

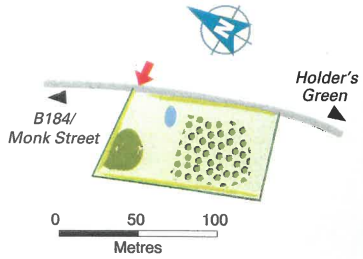
Sweetings Meadow

1.6ac/0.6ha OS Ex195 TL 632 285

A small unimproved hay meadow on chalky boulder clay, also containing a number of fruit trees and a fine pond. It has impressive numbers of cowslips and pyramidal orchids. The many other plants include bee orchid, common spotted orchid, yellow rattle and pepper saxifrage.

About 3km south-east of Thaxted; on a minor road that links the B184 to the B1057 via Holder's Green and Lindsell. The entrance is on the south of the lane a short way west of Holder's Green.

Accessible at all times.



Thorndon Country Park

529ac/214ha OS Ex175 TQ 605 915 SSSI (part) Visitor Centre

Thorndon Country Park is in two parts, the northern section on a gravel ridge and the southern part on clay soil lower down. The two parts are now linked by Old Thorndon Pastures, which is farmland that has been restored to a traditional farming landscape with small hedged fields, grazed by cattle.

It has ancient woodland and parkland, ponds, a marsh and meadow. Ancient trees are an outstanding feature. Giant oak and hornbeam pollards with towering canopies remind us that this was once a deer park. Parts of it used to be heathland, now a scarce habitat in Essex, and to restore it parts of the park, both north and south, are being grazed on rotation by goats and sheep.

The park attracts a large number of woodland birds and sees more than its fair share of passage migrants and winter visitors. For example, large flocks of siskins and redpolls often gather in the birches, and bramblings can be seen near to the centre feeding on beech mast.

South of Brentwood, just west of the A128, which runs from Ongar through Brentwood to join the A127. The main entrance to Thorndon North is off The Avenue, which links the A128 and the B186 (Brentwood–South Ockendon).

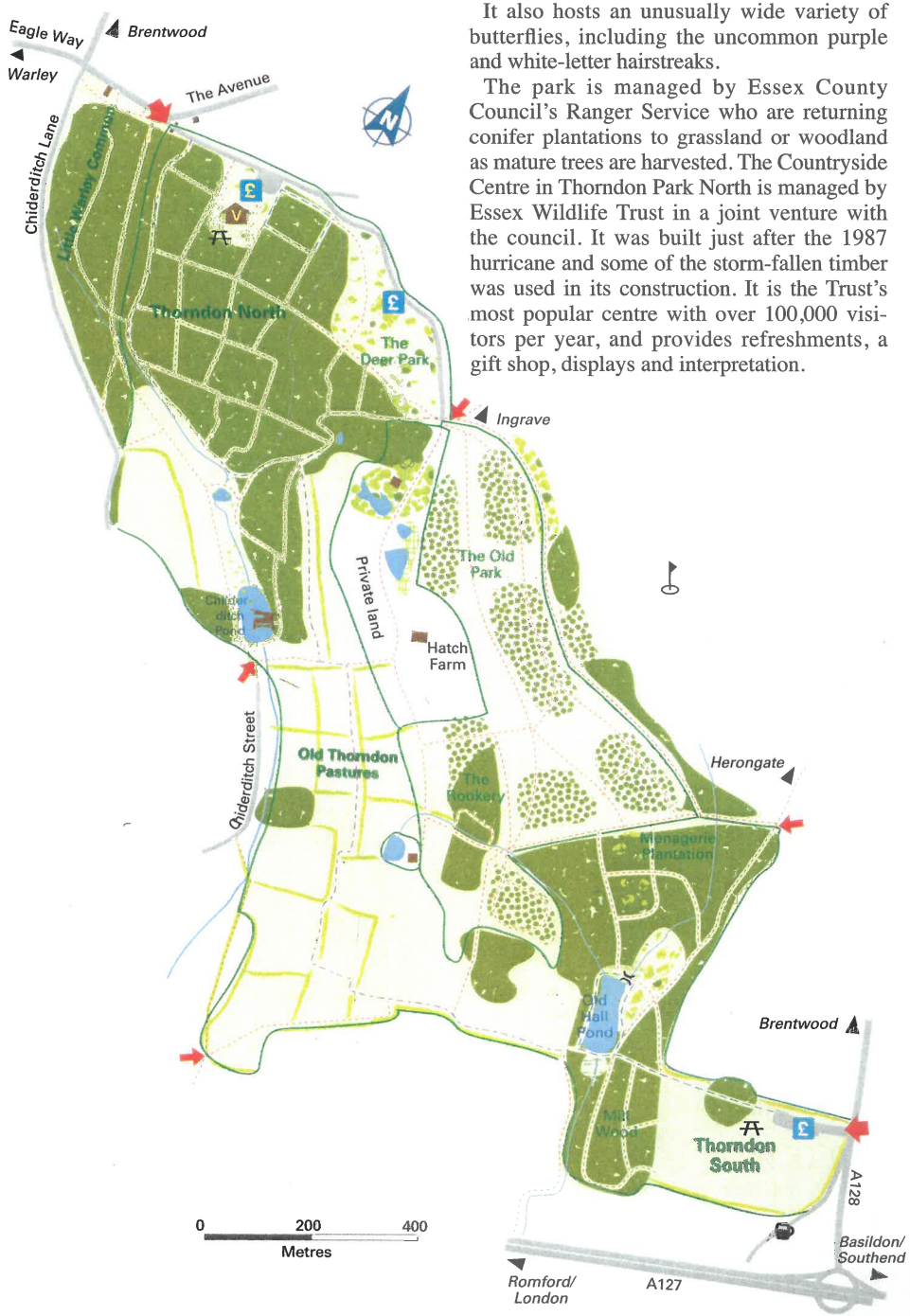
Brentwood railway station is about 2km (via Hartswood and Little Warley Common) from Thorndon North. Buses from Brentwood Town Centre run to Eagle Way, Warley.

Centre open daily 9.30 am–5 pm in summer, 9.30 am–dusk in winter, except Christmas Day. Car park charges £2.20/day.

May for spring flowers and birdsong in the woods; October for fungi.

The centre has wheelchair access and a disabled persons' toilet. A battery-powered scooter can be provided on request.

For more information call the centre on 01277 232944.



It also hosts an unusually wide variety of butterflies, including the uncommon purple and white-letter hairstreaks.

The park is managed by Essex County Council's Ranger Service who are returning conifer plantations to grassland or woodland as mature trees are harvested. The Countryside Centre in Thorndon Park North is managed by Essex Wildlife Trust in a joint venture with the council. It was built just after the 1987 hurricane and some of the storm-fallen timber was used in its construction. It is the Trust's most popular centre with over 100,000 visitors per year, and provides refreshments, a gift shop, displays and interpretation.

Thrift Wood

48ac/19ha OS Ex183 TL 790 017 SSSI

This ancient wood consists of hornbeam coppice with many oak standards, some birch, ash and coppiced sweet chestnut, and a number of wild service trees.

It is one of the principal Essex sites of the common cow-wheat, food plant of the heath fritillary butterfly. After becoming extinct in Essex, this butterfly was re-established in the reserve in 1984. It also has lots of slender St John's wort, heath wood-rush and pale and pill sedges.

There is a sizable pool with a raised bog, thought to have been formed many years ago from clay-digging for brickmaking. Here can be found greater spearwort, hop sedge and other aquatic plants, three species of sphagnum moss and the hair-moss *Polytrichum commune*.

Birds include woodpeckers and a good population of woodland warblers. The wood teems with wood ants and has a wide range of other insects.

Coppicing has been reintroduced, resulting in a marked increase in both resident and summer migrant birds and also in plantlife. The pond with its raised bog is cleared annually of rank vegetation.

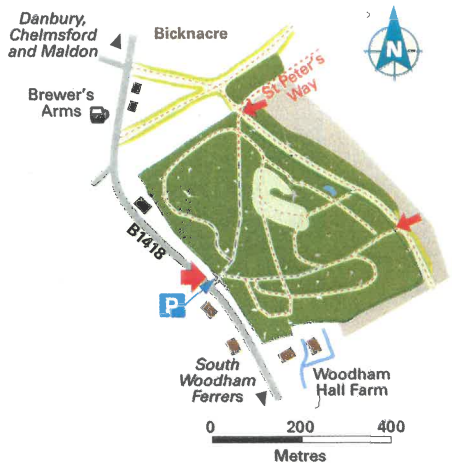
The entrance is on the B1418 road 400m south of the Brewer's Arms PH in Bicknacre. There is parking for a few cars at the main gate, with overflow parking on the verge opposite.

Buses run every half-hour between Chelmsford and South Woodham Ferrers, stopping at the main gate.

Accessible at all times.

May for spring flowers and birdsong; late May on for heath fritillary and other butterflies.

Do not attempt to cross the pool's raised bog as conditions are dangerous.



Common cow-wheat

Thurrock Thameside Nature Park

845ac/342ha OS Ex163 TQ 693 805

Visitor Centre

This new Nature Park is being created on a large landfill site at Mucking. The visitor centre and the first section of the nature park opened in summer 2012 and further sections will open over the coming years as restoration continues.

This first section consists mainly of rough grassland and already supports good numbers of skylarks, harvest mice and other small mammals, and reptiles. Its wild flowers attract many pollinating insects such as bumblebees, and more work is planned to improve it in this respect. It will be grazed by Exmoor ponies.

The visitor centre offers an observation room, hot and cold refreshments, and a shop. There are impressive views both from inside and from the roof across Mucking Flats and the Thames, where internationally important numbers of ringed plover and avocet, and nationally important numbers of grey plover, dunlin, godwit and redshank feed in winter, along with many other species. It also has top-class education and training facilities.

A network of footpaths has been laid out across the site, and an all-ability path leads down to a bird hide overlooking the Thames Estuary. Views from here will be good for harbour porpoise, common seals and sea birds.

The value of the Nature Park to wildlife and its interest to visitors will grow over the years as habitats improve under conservation management, and as more parts of the landfill site are restored and included, eventually connecting all the way through to East Tilbury Quarries to the south.

The nature park would not have been possible without the support of Cory Environmental Trust in Thurrock, Parklands and Cory Environmental Ltd, together with members of Essex Wildlife Trust and the local community.

Harvest mouse

Accessed from Mucking Wharf Road, south of Stanford-le-Hope. Enter Stanford-le-Hope from the west via the A1013 and turn right on to Butts Lane. Mucking Wharf Road turns off left 400m down. Follow the road across the railway then on to the reserve entrance.

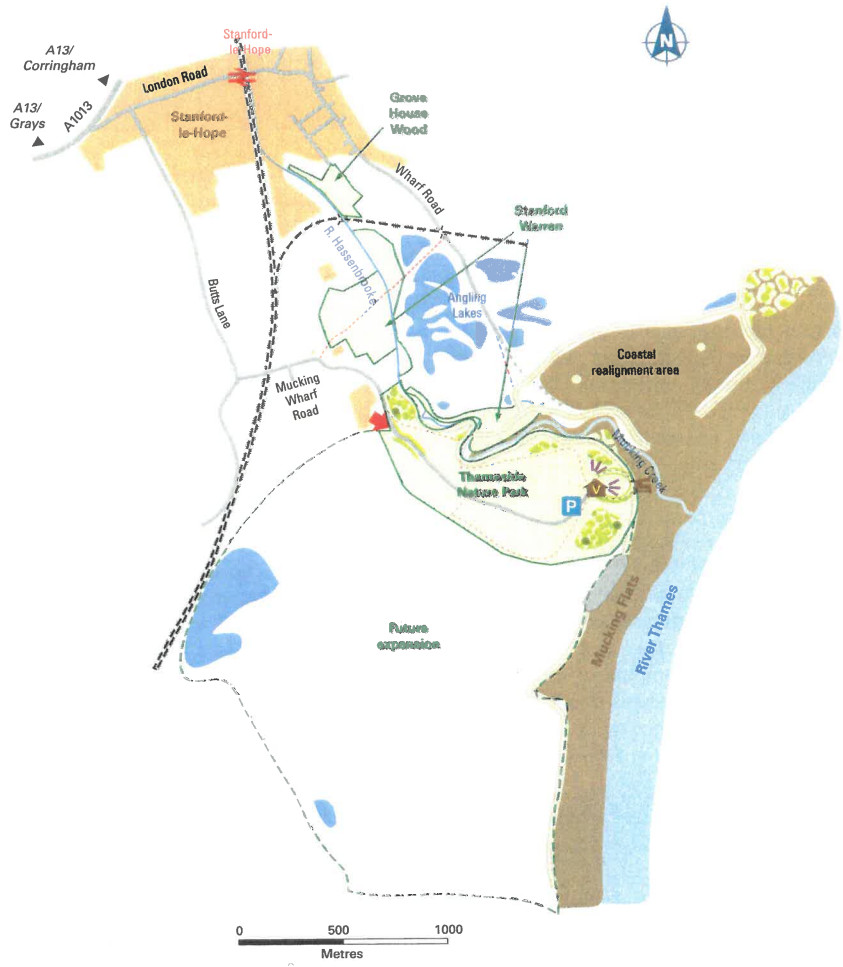
20 minutes' walk from Stanford-le-Hope station (Fenchurch St line). Turn right outside the station then right again into Wharf Road. After passing under the railway turn right on to the footpath across Stanford Warren nature reserve, which emerges on to Mucking Wharf Road. Turn left and follow the road to the reserve entrance.

9 am to 5 pm every day except Christmas Day.

Autumn and winter for migrating and over-wintering birds; spring and summer for wild flowers and songbirds.

An all-ability path leads to a bird hide overlooking the estuary.

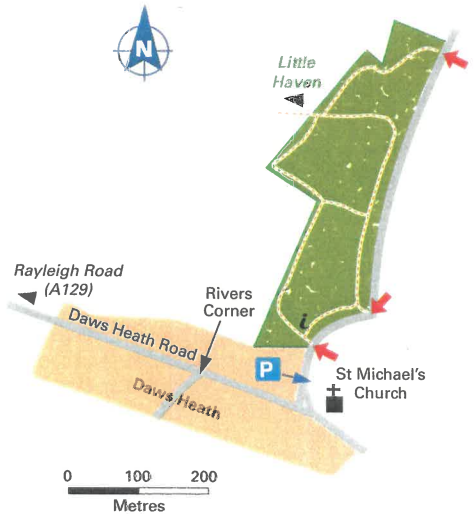
Dogs allowed only on leads.



Tile Wood

16ac/6ha OS Ex175 TQ 816 890

One of the earliest ancient woods to have been recorded in south-east Essex, being mentioned in anglo-saxon times. The tree species are predominately sessile oak, hornbeam and sweet chestnut, with some wild service. It is particularly rich in ancient woodland plants, including wood sorrel, bluebell and wood-rush, and has many wood ants.



Turn south off the A127 at Rayleigh Weir on to Rayleigh Road (A129) and turn left on to Daws Heath Road at the Woodmans Arms mini-roundabout. Or join the A129 from the A13 and turn right on to Daws Heath Road. Park on local streets with consideration for residents.

Hourly bus service exc. Sundays serves Daws Heath Road. More frequent services run along Rayleigh Road and pass Woodmans Arms PH (1 mile to west via Daws Heath Road).

Accessible at all times.

April to June for spring flowers and songbirds; October for fungi.

To minimise disturbance to wildlife, please keep to the designated paths.

Tiptree Heath

60ac/24ha OS Ex184 TL 883 147 SSSI

Tiptree Heath is a small fragment of a huge heathland that used to stretch from Maldon to Messing, covering thousands of acres. It is the finest and largest area of heath in Essex, and the only place where you will find all three native species of heather growing together.

The heath had been nibbled away by enclosure for centuries before it received what seemed like a death blow during World War II, when the common land laws were suspended and it was ploughed up for agriculture. But it produced only poor crops, and in 1955 was sown with grass seed and left to look after itself. The result was that some of it turned into light woodland and scrub, but on large areas the heathland plants reappeared.

In 1973 the present heath was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It is privately owned, and managed by Essex Wildlife Trust with the support of the Friends of Tiptree Heath.

In 2008 fencing was installed to create two grazing compartments. The following years have seen summer grazing of up to seven cows, and winter grazing of four Exmoor ponies. Animals are grazed in only one compartment at any time and notices are displayed accordingly. Together with conservation management carried out by local volunteers and Essex Wildlife Trust staff, the grazing has established a more open, balanced

heath with even greater beauty and associated wildlife.

Ling heather, which is tall and vigorous enough to survive in gorse, covers large areas, and there are areas of bell heather and a small amount of cross-leaved heath that prefers the wetter parts. In late summer, harebells can be seen with their dainty blue bell-shaped flowers. The heath also has a number of other unusual wild plants, including allseed and chaffweed.

Its birdlife includes many willow warblers and whitethroats, nightingales, and the occasional woodcock.

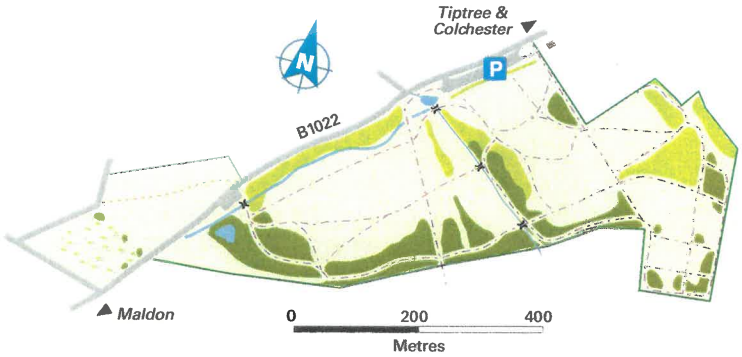
The heath straddles the B1022 (Colchester–Maldon) 800m on the Maldon side of Tiptree.

A regular bus service between Maldon and Colchester runs along the B1022 past the heath.

Accessible at all times.

April to see acres of gorse in flower; July–September for late flowers, including the heather, and grassland butterflies.

Call the Community Warden on 07842 110051.



Tollesbury Wick

599ac/240ha OS Ex176 TL 970 104 SSSI, SPA

This is a rare example of an Essex fresh water grazing marsh, worked for decades by traditional methods sympathetic to wildlife. It is grazed by the Trust's own rare breed sheep and cattle. The main pillars of management are water level control and getting the right level of grazing to create good conditions for wildlife.

Wildlife is abundant in its 600 acres of rough pasture, borrowdykes, seawalls, wet flushes, pools and saltmarsh. Large areas of rough pasture suit small mammals such as field vole and pygmy shrew. In winter, they in turn attract hunting hen harriers and short-eared owls.

Dry grassland on the slopes of the seawalls supports a wide variety of insects, including butterflies, bush crickets and grasshoppers. In spring spiny rest-harrow, grass vetchling, slender hare's-ear and many other wild flowers can be found in ungrazed areas.

Borrowdykes trace the inland edge of the sinuous seawall for its entire length. Common reed, sea clubrush and fennel pondweed are typical plants of these brackish areas where reed warbler and reed bunting nest in spring, and heron and little grebe search for food. Wet flushes, dykes and small pools in the pasture support aquatic plants such as water crowfoot, and breeding populations of dragonflies and other aquatic species.

Golden plover, lapwing, brent geese and wigeon feed or roost on the winter-wet grassland.

Outside the seawall, creeks, saltmarsh and exposed mud support typical communities of invertebrates, coastal birds and saltmarsh flowers. The shingle spits have yellow horned-poppy, and also a small breeding colony of little terns.

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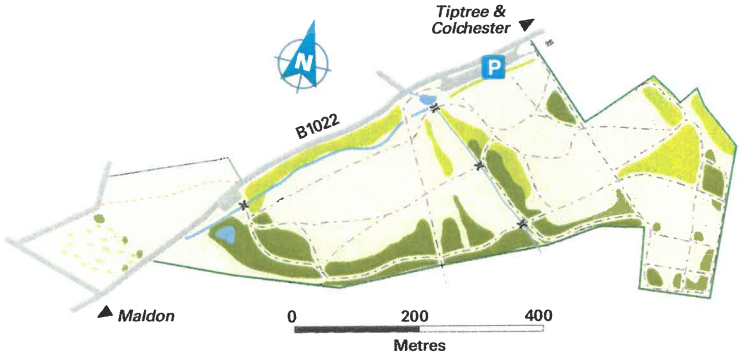

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Little tern

Follow the B1023 to Tollesbury via Tiptree, leaving the A12 at Kelvedon, then follow Woodrolfe Road towards the marina and car park at Woodrolfe Green.

Bus services run to Tollesbury from Maldon, Colchester and Witham.

Accessible at all times along the footpath on top of the seawall.

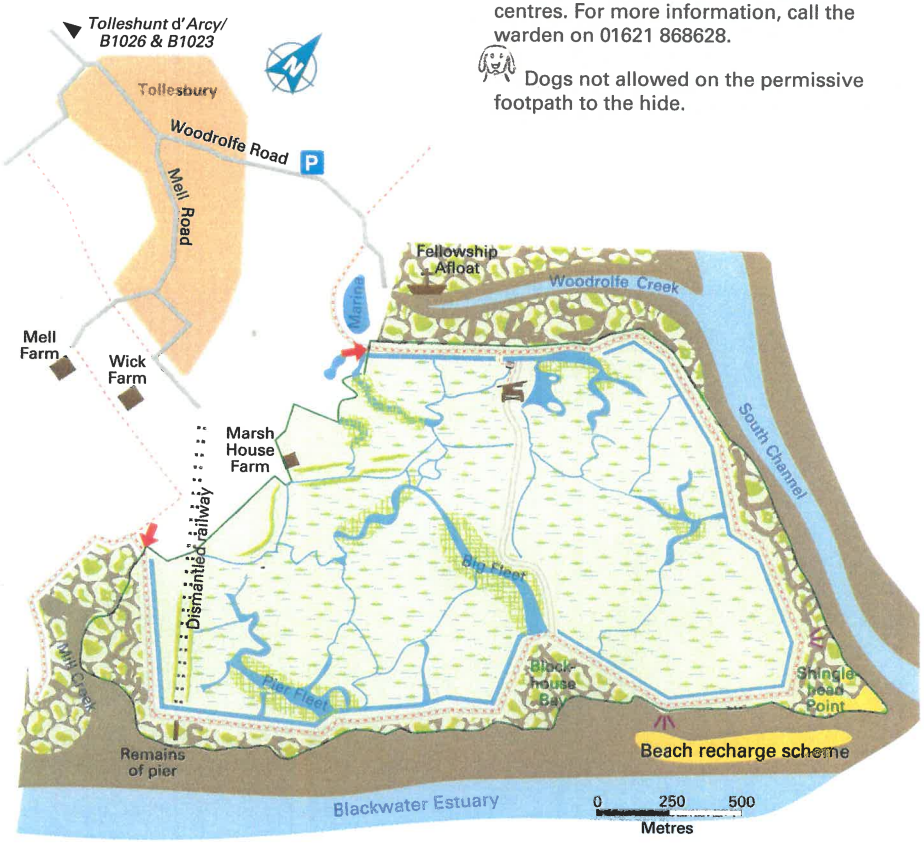
Suitable for motorised wheelchair access up to Blockhouse Bay.

May for birdsong; July for saltmarsh colours and for insects; winter for wildfowl and waders.

Sheep ticks can be a problem in April–June: keep out of the long grass or wear light-coloured (so the ticks can easily be seen) long trousers for protection.

from Essex Wildlife Trust visitor centres. For more information, call the warden on 01621 868628.

Dogs not allowed on the permissive footpath to the hide.



Turner's Spring

8ac/3ha OS Ex195 TL 529 243

A mixed deciduous woodland, including a strip running alongside the Bourne Brook, plus a meadow with a central wet area of sedge beds. It was given to Essex Wildlife Trust by the Cawkell trustees in 1975.

The main wood contains oak, beech, ash and sycamore, with areas of hazel and hornbeam coppice. Spring brings a fine display of oxlips, violets, dog's mercury and herb paris, with a profusion of naturalised daffodils on either side of the central path.

Cowslip, bugle, salad burnet, agrimony and meadowsweet flower in the meadow.

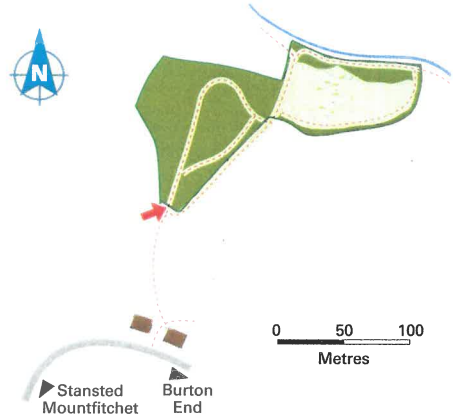
The woodland strip along the Bourne Brook has carpets of violets in the spring, with some oxlips and scattered wood anemones. Where the water from the sedge beds drains into a deep depression a tufa pile has formed – pendulous sedge grows here.

Over 60 species of bird have been recorded. Butterflies are mostly limited to the commoner species but include the ringlet.

Reached via a footpath from the Stansted–Burton End road. The footpath is on the left about 600m beyond the bridge over the M11, marked by a footpath sign beside a black-painted village pump. Cars may be parked on the road nearby.

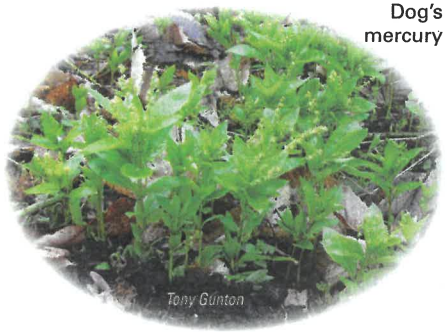
Accessible at all times.

Spring for wild flowers.



Agrimony

Dog's mercury



Two Tree Island

641ac/260ha OS Ex175 TQ 824 852 SSSI, NNR

Two Tree Island typifies the history of many Essex coastal sites. It was reclaimed from the sea in the 18th century when a sea-wall was built around saltmarsh, and was used for rough grazing until 1910 when a sewage farm was built on its eastern tip. In 1936 Southend Council acquired the whole island and used it as a rubbish tip until the 1970s. Now it is leased to Essex Wildlife Trust as a nature reserve.

Turn south off the A13 down to Leigh station, then cross the bridge over the railway and follow the road past the golf range and over the bridge on to the island. There is a car park immediately over the bridge.

Twenty minutes' walk from Leigh station (Fenchurch St line), which is also served by a number of bus services.

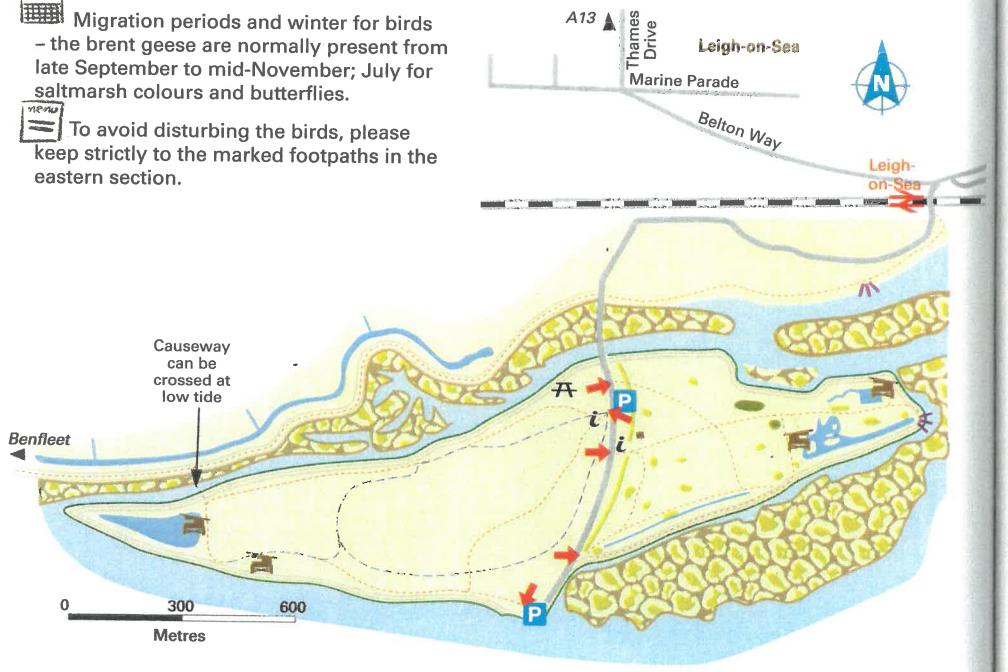
Accessible at all times.

Migration periods and winter for birds – the brent geese are normally present from late September to mid-November; July for saltmarsh colours and butterflies.

To avoid disturbing the birds, please keep strictly to the marked footpaths in the eastern section.

The island itself consists of grassland, scrub, reedbed and lagoons, and supports a number of interesting plants and 'escapes'. A wide variety of birds is seen, and particularly migrants. Kestrels hover over the grassland and short-eared owls visit during the winter, hunting for field voles, and large numbers of little egrets roost here. Water vole, kingfisher, water rail, reed and sedge warblers may be seen in the lagoons and reedbed, while adder, slow worm and common lizard frequent the grassland. Insects of note include the marbled white butterfly, roesel's bush-cricket, the house cricket and the lesser marsh grasshopper.

The western section has a network of surfaced paths. At its western tip is a lagoon with a bird hide, from which you can see birds such as redshank and heron feeding. Recently avocets have started to nest here also.



The eastern section is part of Leigh National Nature Reserve, along with the adjoining saltmarsh and a large area of intertidal mudflats. The saltmarsh, along the southern shore of the island, is one of the best surviving in the Thames estuary. Among many typical saltmarsh plants it has golden samphire, sea wormwood, sea purslane, common and lax-flowered sea lavenders and sea aster.

The mudflats support dense beds of eel grass and provide a valuable feeding ground for wildfowl and waders, and especially the dark-bellied brent goose. The concentration of thousands of these birds arriving on their autumn migration is of international importance. Waders such as curlew, dunlin, redshank, grey plover and knot occur in significant numbers outside the breeding season.

The Leigh cockle sheds nearby bring winter flocks of turnstone close inshore and attract some of the rarer gull species.

Warley Place

25ac/10ha OS Ex175 TQ 583 906

Warley Place is the site of a house and once-famous gardens said to have been laid out by the diarist John Evelyn in the 17th century. The house was demolished in the 1930s and the last occupant was Miss Ellen Willmott, who died in 1934. She remodelled the gardens and introduced into them a vast assortment of new plants from all over the world. It is now a nature reserve managed by Essex Wildlife Trust.

The garden had fallen into neglect but has now been restored by an enthusiastic team of volunteers, although not in its original form. Parts of the built remains can still be seen and a number of the surviving plants. Daffodils, snowdrops, winter aconites, anemones, cranesbills and ferns grow in profusion again, mingling with native species. Among a variety of trees, some exotic, is a line of huge sweet chestnuts.

The reserve attracts a wide variety of birds, including the nuthatch, and has a good selection of invertebrates, including stag beetles.

On the B186 (Brentwood–S. Ockendon) just south of Brentwood. Entrance next to the Thatchers Arms PH.

Infrequent buses from Brentwood to Romford and Grays run past the entrance: ask for Thatchers Arms.

On weekends from end February to early April the gates are manned by volunteers and several thousand visitors come to see the daffodils and other spring flowers. Otherwise access for Essex Wildlife Trust members and holders of day permits only: call Essex Wildlife Trust on 01621 862960.

No dogs allowed except guide dogs.

Waterhall Meadows

5.7ac/2ha OS Ex183 TL 759 072

An ancient unimproved flood meadow on the west bank of Sandon Brook that used to flood regularly, but rarely does so today.

Cowslip and meadow saxifrage flower in the meadow in spring, lady's bedstraw is conspicuous in mid-summer, and devilsbit scabious and pepper saxifrage appear later. At the far corner of the meadow is a small pond in which grow amphibious bistort, great water dock and fine-leaved water dropwort. Goldilocks buttercup flowers nearby in spring and a little further on hemp agrimony and spindle grow together by the brookside.

Among the 84 bird species recorded are eight species of warbler, at least six of which nest regularly. The kingfisher is a regular visitor and has bred in the reserve.

The reserve is rich in insect life. Its dragonflies and damselflies are particularly notable: 17 species have been recorded including the unusual white-legged damselfly, present in large numbers.

A hay cut is taken in summer and cattle graze in winter.

In Little Baddow. Turn off the A414 into Hammonds Road at the roundabout signposted Boreham, and after 1 mile turn right into Hurrells Lane. Entrance is by a stile on the right before a ford through Sandon Brook. There is limited parking by the entrance.

Accessible at all times

Spring and summer for flowers; summer for dragonflies along the brook.

Please keep dogs on a lead when there is livestock on the reserve.

Weeleyhall Wood

78ac/31ha OS Ex184 TM 156 212 SSSI

Weeleyhall Wood is one of the finest surviving woods in Tendring, although it suffered severely in the 1987 storm. Standard oaks provide most of the timber but there are about eight acres of sweet chestnut coppice, a similar area of scots and corsican pine plantation, an area of hazel coppice, and alder glades with an important ground flora that includes moschatel.

In spring the bluebells, which carpet almost half the wood, yellow archangel and climbing corydalis make a fine display. Several fern species are also to be found.

The wood has good numbers of woodland birds – including nightingales which have increased with the reintroduction of coppicing – and the commoner butterflies.

Reached from the B1441 (Colchester to Clacton). Park in front of Weeley Church. Access to the wood is down a private track just past the pond.

Several bus services to/from Clacton run along the B1441. Or train to Weeley and more than a mile walk each way.

Accessible at all times

May for early flowers and breeding birds.

Please keep dogs on a lead down the track across farmland and under strict control within the wood.

Nightingale

West Wood

58ac/23ha OS Ex195 TL 624 332 SSSI

This mixed deciduous wood near Thaxted is one of the finest in the area. On chalky boulder clay, it has a history of coppicing dating back to the middle ages. This ceased in the middle of the last century but was resumed by Essex Wildlife Trust when it acquired the site in 1972.

As well as oxlips, it has early purple and greater butterfly orchids and also wood barley, which is rare in Essex. Pendulous sedge grows along the rides.

The wood has a good selection of nesting birds among which are goldcrest, several species of warbler, stock dove and buzzard. It also supports good numbers of butterflies including speckled wood, brimstone and ringlet.

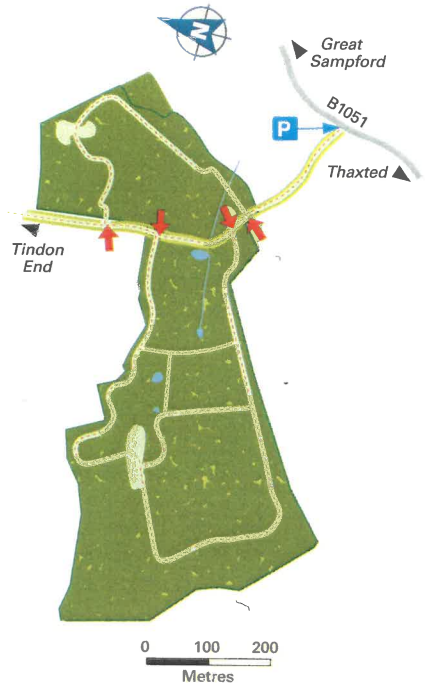
Four ponds in the wood have been restored, and support great crested newts as well as many dragonflies and damselflies.

The wood has been returned to a coppice cycle and areas of Norway spruce have been removed. Large numbers of deer frequent the wood and precautions need to be taken to prevent them from browsing the young coppice regrowth and thus stunting or killing the trees: chestnut paling or brushwood fencing is erected around newly coppiced areas to keep them out.

Midway between Thaxted and Great Sampford, set back from the B1051. A track leads to the reserve entrance from the left-hand side of the road, one mile north-east of Thaxted. Or you can walk in along the bridleway from Tindon End.

Accessible at all times.

Early spring through to mid-summer for flowers and breeding birds; mid-spring through to early autumn for butterflies.



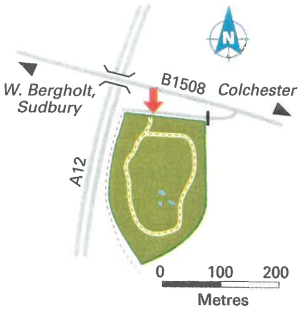
Oxlip

Westhouse Wood

7ac/3ha OS Ex184 TL 974 272

Despite its small size this wood on the outskirts of Colchester contains a wide range of trees and shrubs. Hazel is the dominant coppice species, and small-leaved lime, crab apple and rowan are scattered among fine oak and ash standards, along with sweet chestnut, holly and field maple.

As a result of coppicing, bluebells and wood anemones carpet the wood in spring, and there are fine displays of foxgloves in areas that have recently been cleared. Work has also been carried out to keep three small ponds, occupied by newts and frogs, wet throughout the summer months.



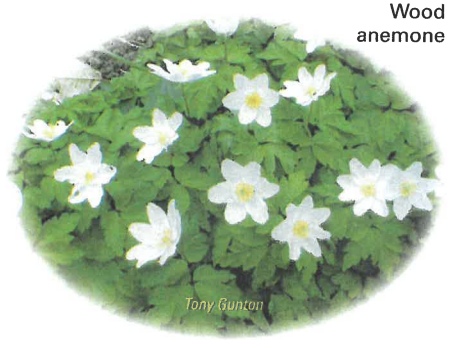
The entrance is down a slip road on the left off the B1508 Colchester–Sudbury road, just before it passes over the A12 at Braiswick, north-west of Colchester.

Bus services from Colchester to West Bergholt, Bures and Sudbury run past the entrance.

Accessible at all times.

Foxglove

Wood anemone



Woodham Fen

20ac/8ha OS Ex175/6 TQ 798 975 SSSI, SPA

This reserve lies between and near the tidal limits of two small creeks running south into the River Crouch. It was common land given in the 12th century by the Lords of the Manor to the poor of the community to graze animals. The southern part is saltmarsh and the northern rough grassland with a transitional zone between the two – of special interest because this natural transition is now very unusual in Essex. It has a wide range of saltmarsh plants, including sea wormwood, and the grassland is full of wild flowers, including unusual ones such as slender birdsfoot trefoil, grass vetchling, wild carrot and crested hair-grass.

It also attracts many unusual birds, such as reed bunting, yellow wagtail and meadow pipit, and a variety of small waders occur on passage. Teal, snipe and rock pipit are to be found in winter, when kingfishers hunt along the creeks for eels. Barn owls and other birds of prey hunt over the grassland for the many field voles.

Bush-crickets and saltmarsh moths are notable among the insects. Essex skipper and a number of the other common butterflies are abundant, as are common lizards and slow worms.

The reserve lies within a much larger area of common land owned by South Woodham Ferrers Town Council. This area is managed on advice from the Trust and in all includes about 85 acres of grassland, scrub, ditches and ponds.

Can be entered from the A132 (Basildon/Wickford–Woodham) at the Shaw Farm roundabout, a few miles from Wickford, where it meets the B1012.

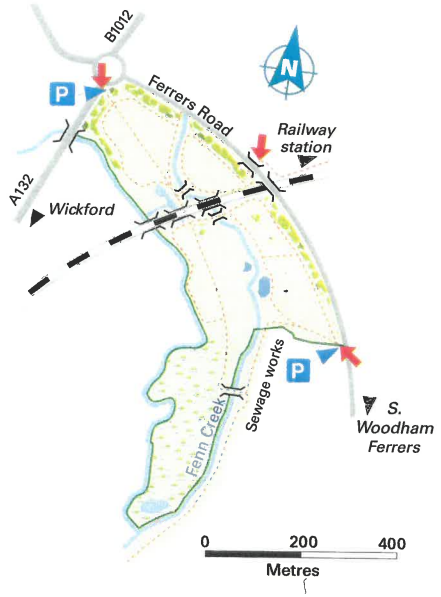
The railway station at South Woodham Ferrers is about five minutes' walk via a footpath. Bus services run to and from Chelmsford, Wickford and Basildon.

Accessible at all times via footpaths.

Midsummer onwards for wild flowers and butterflies; migration periods and winter for birds.

Paths can be very muddy in winter.

available from Woodham Town Council office in Reeves Way or Town Information Office in Baron Road Parade.



Essex skipper

Wrabness

54ac/22ha OS Ex184 TM 167 315 LNR

This area served as a mine depot until its demolition in 1963. Attempts to develop the site ran into public opposition and in 1992 it became a nature reserve under the care of the Wrabness Nature Reserve Charitable Trust. It is managed now by Essex Wildlife Trust.

It is mainly open grassland and scrub, with a pond, a bog, a wooded fringe and a bird hide overlooking the Stour Estuary. It attracts open country birds such as yellowhammers (increasingly scarce elsewhere) and whitethroats to nest, and has large numbers of grassland butterflies and other insects in summer.

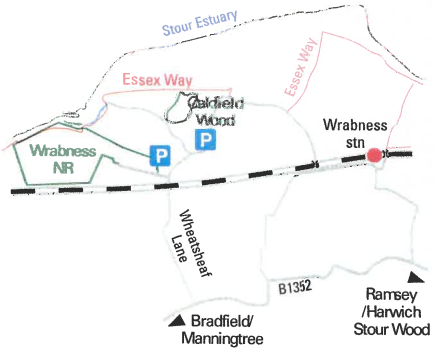
Reached via Wheatsheaf Lane, which turns off the B1352 between Bradfield and Wrabness. A turning half-left just beyond the railway bridge leads to the car park.

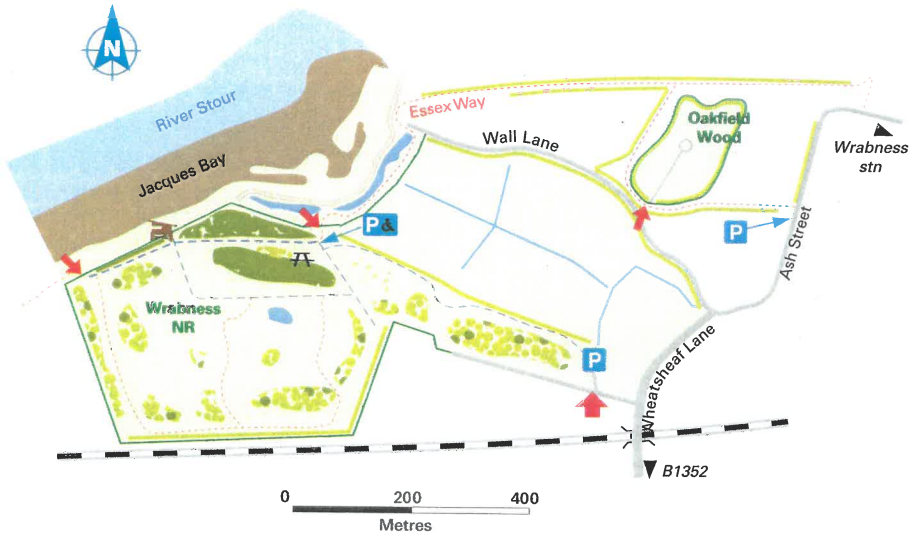
About a mile walk from Wrabness rail station via a public footpath. A bus service from Colchester to Harwich runs along the B1352.

Accessible at all times.

May for birdsong; summer for wild flowers and butterflies.

Good wheelchair access.





New nature reserves and visitor centre

Belfairs Woodland Centre

TQ 834 876 — Visitor Centre

The new Woodland Centre in Belfairs Park, opening in summer 2013, will provide a space for schools, groups and families to learn more about our wildlife-rich ancient woodlands. Events and outdoor activities will be arranged throughout the year and opportunities will be provided for volunteers to gain practical experience in managing woodlands, grasslands and other important habitats.

The Woodland Centre will have a meeting hall that will be available for hire. Skilled staff will be able to provide bespoke activities for special interest groups and walks will be arranged to help people appreciate the valuable natural and cultural heritage of this area.

The main entrance to Belfairs Park is in Eastwood Road North, which can be reached from the A13 via Eastwood Road and is signposted from the A127 westbound.

Regular bus services between Basildon and Southend run along the A13 to the south.

Cockaynes Wood

50ac/20ha — TM 054 215

Cockaynes Wood is an ancient woodland near Wivenhoe, but the reserve also includes another small wood, Villa Wood, and a former quarry, now restored to heath, grassland and ponds. It is managed by Essex Wildlife Trust and Cockaynes Wood Trust under lease from the owners, Brett Group.

With its variety of habitats, the reserve is important for invertebrates, including white admiral, green hairstreak and small heath butterflies. Amphibians and birds such as little grebe, lapwing, redshank and reed bunting frequent the ponds and damper areas, and willow warbler, linnet and turtle dove the open habitats.

Between Wivenhoe and Alresford, accessed via a public footpath that runs north from Wivenhoe Road about 1km west of Alresford, or from Cockaynes Lane in Alresford. Vehicle access is via a track that leaves the Wivenhoe–Alresford road just north of the railway, on the eastern side.

Gunners Park

84ac/34ha — TQ 932 843

This is all that remains of a large area of common and rough grazing stretching from Southend to Shoebury, consisting of a barrier beach and spit backed in some places by marshland. Part of it used to be rifle ranges and therefore it is untouched by agriculture.

It is mainly grassland, divided by ditches and dykes lined with reed, and with patches of dense scrub and clumps of trees. This combination makes for good bird and insect life in summer. Goldfinches, linnets and whitethroats nest in the scrub, and kestrels and barn owls hunt over the grassland. It is also a good place to see unusual passage migrants in autumn and spring.

A botanically rich area at the south-west corner is an SSSI and is managed as a nature reserve.

Entrance in Campfield Road, Shoeburyness, just beyond the end of the A13.

10 minutes walk from Shoeburyness station. Buses run from Southend centre.

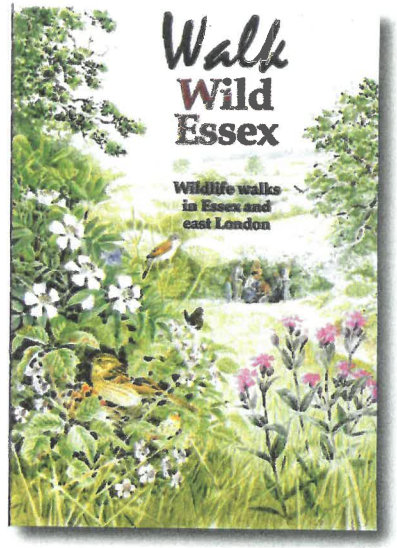
Other books by Tony Gunton

Walk Wild Essex

This attractive book describes 50 different walks in every part of Essex and east London, many easily accessible by train or tube.

Full colour route maps include landscape features such as hedges and woods, to make it easier for you to find your way, and are supported by detailed stage-by-stage directions.

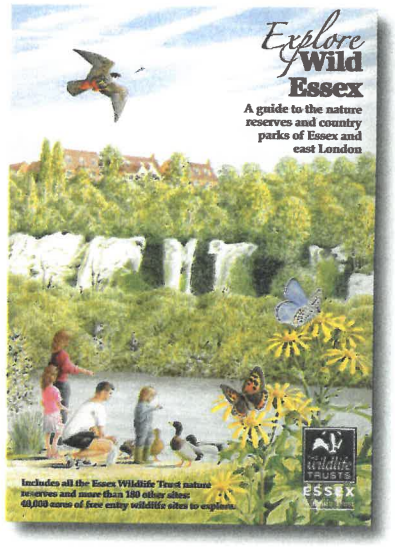
The maps are accompanied by summaries, including best time, highlights, drawbacks and the going; information on local transport and parking, and places to eat or picnic; notes on wildlife to look out for en route and colour photographs of landscapes and species you are likely to see.



Explore Wild Essex

This best-selling guide includes details of all the nature reserves run by Essex Wildlife Trust, RSPB, Woodland Trust and other conservation organisations, plus 180 other wildlife sites – a total of 40,000 acres right across Essex and east London.

Tables and indexes help you to choose the best time to visit and which sites have the facilities you need. Over 200 detailed colour maps help you to find and explore each site. Numerous colour photographs illustrate the most interesting Essex animals, plants and habitats.



Available from book shops and visitor centres in Essex or order online at www.wildessex.net/main/books.html.